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TO

CONINGSBY DISRAELI

LORD OF THE MANOR OF HUGHENDEN

WHOSE HONOURED NAME AND DEEP PERSONAL INTEREST

IN THE ANTIQUITIES OF BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

ENTITLE HIM TO THE HOMAGE OF

ALL WHO LOVE THAT COUNTY

THESE PAGES ARE

DEDICATED

PREFACE

It is a nice point whether the pleasures of Collecting lie in possession or in pursuit of the objects collected; cynics may add that the collector's chief joy lies in the implied deprivation of rival collectors. Generally speaking, we gather together pictures, furniture, or snuff-boxes for our own gratification in some way or other, even if we finally bequeath them to an art gallery or museum.

The following pages form a "catalogue raisonné" of a collection which cannot be realised at Christie's, or at any of the world's marts; but then it merely represents the amusement of leisure hours and the exercise of a moderate amount of observation. For the making of the collection has been a Pastime; and a thoroughbred hobby-horse at that, one which furnishes its rider with unlimited physical exercise, is perfectly quiet to ride or drive, and can work with a small allowance of corn. The docile creature has never wearied in twenty years, and bids fair to last as long as its rider.

It may be urged that however innocent the collection may be there was no need to advertise it by publication. To justify this it is necessary to say something about the Infatuation of Topographical Antiquaries, the Common Sense of Publishers, and the supreme Indifference of the General Public.

No wonder that topographers form "common objects of the country!" Nothing so easy to write,—and nothing so impossible to sell,—as topography. Pray note that of the countless editions of White's "Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne" scarcely one edition in a hundred reprints the "Antiquities." The light-hearted guide-book compiler, with merry quip and busy scissors and paste, can produce something which is marketable. The jovial sportsman, with anecdote and jest, can always gain a hearing.

But the antiquary, a painstaking but ponderous person, must be prepared to pay for the luxury of seeing his note-book in print. Not that he is an altruist;—in the present case he is precisely other than that,—he is apolaustic. Altruism is one of those useful words coined by ingenious man to disguise his inherent selfishness, and it is not love of his fellow-men so much as a great and abiding love of Buckinghamshire which has impelled the present writer to add to that dread pile of unwanted books by writing about places and things which have yielded him all the happiest hours he has known.

The twin motives which cause men to write—Money and Fame—are completely absent; whoever holds illusions to the contrary should read the lives of the truly great topographers (the county historians) in the "Dictionary of National Biography;" generally speaking, he will find himself studying the "Calamities of Authors."

As regards the Common Sense of Publishers, it is a good thing for the ordered governance of an unruly world that (as Emerson puts it) there is a spirit of compensation pervading all our actions; so that the impassioned litigant is balanced by his clear-headed lawyer, and the enthusiastic writer by the prosaic and business-like publisher. From the over production of books we groan as our country groans from excessive population, and the fact that a book must usually pay for itself is a wholesome check upon that dreadful disease called "cacoëthes scribendi."

It was admitted above that the writer was apolaustic; so self-indulgent indeed is he that he confesses he was first inclined to the present publication by the appearance of two unlucky slips in the first edition. Several friends (and the "Times Literary Supplement" in the course of a kindly notice) gently drew attention to them; they were blunders of a kind which lurk

unobserved in the proofs, like some insidious parasite waiting for the broad light of publication to hatch them out, to the infinite misery of their host.

These two miserable slips rankled deeply; to compare small things with great the writer felt (as Thackeray said Addison should be painted after reading Pope's lines on Atticus) that "he should be drawn, like St. Sebastian, with that arrow in his side."

The present edition will remove those blemishes (and, let us devoutly hope, avoid others)—but the opportunity to add could not be neglected. From adding to existing chapters one soon passed to adding new chapters; then the necessity for further illustrations arose, and in no time one found a pamphlet puffed up into a small book.

For the moment he will merely admit that he looks upon the pages which follow with some humility and a much-chastened pride; but life is short, and the question arises whether a few facts should not be saved now, with the hope that time may add to them and yield a more worthy memorial of a county which richly deserves it.

That the facts are recorded from first-hand observation need not be said; they are put down here solely because they could not be found elsewhere in print. They are the product of many thousand miles of heel-and-toe work during the last score of years, and if one were to measure all this walking as Hood said that Lamb "calculated distances, not by Long Measure but by Ale and Beer Measure,"—it would amount to a formidable number of hogsheads. Ale and Archæology match as well as Toping and Topography, and we have a notable example of the success of that union in "Drunken Barnabee's Journal."

One other plea for publication there is: less than two years separates the second edition from the first, but death has withdrawn some of the witnesses from

tendering evidence of that Past, which each instant fades further into the distance and becomes more difficult to re-construct. A hundred accidents of fire and flood may remove some of the relics described before these pages are in print.

A kindly critic of the first edition ("C. K.S.," of "The Sphere,") regretted its "repellant title;" what terms of reproof await the present one it remains to be seen; one merit must be allowed—it is at least shorter.

Had the subject been concerned with a remote age and an alien race,—how eagerly would it have been welcomed! To write of those relics of Yesterday which linger at our very doors To-day is to call attention to something which "all can see for themselves" —and, for the most part, ignore on that account.

Had the writer devoted a quarter of the time to work in the Public Record Office or in muniment-rooms, what a monument of erudition might have been raised! Had he been scholar enough for the task, he might have gained in reputation,—but he would certainly have lost in health, and the names which appear on the map at the beginning of this book would not have been able to raise such vivid images, the fruit of happy memories.

The writer has outgrown all illusions on the subject,—he does not expect the slightest interest to be shown by his contemporaries in the facts which he has brought together. He thinks it likely, though, that when "Time which antiquates antiquities" (as Sir Thomas Browne put it) has removed material objects here described or depicted, or usage has forgotten words and methods here recorded,—there will be found someone who may be grateful for this collection. But long before then the writer's dust will, he hopes, have mingled with the soil of the county which to him is truly venerable.

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CHAPTER I

OLD COTTAGES

. . . . the rude architect, unknown to fame,
(Nor symmetry nor elegance his aim),
Who spread his floors of solid oak on high
On beams rough-hewn, from age to age that lie.

BLOOMFIELD: *"Farmer's Boy."*

The dictionary tells us that a cottage is "a labourer's or villager's small dwelling;" we should certainly expect to find it inhabited by an employee rather than by an employer, and we are quite entitled to exclaim: "What charming cottages!" when we pass through many of our villages. But a point often forgotten is that the oldest, and probably the most picturesque cottages were not built for labourers at all.[1] The old legal definition of a cottage gave us considerably less scope in considering what a cottage is, for we are told[2] that "by a statute I. Eliz. cap 7 no man may build a house unless he lay four acres of land to it; so that a cottage is properly any little house that hath not four acres of land belonging to it."

The amount of accommodation considered necessary for decent living has altered very largely in the last three centuries; learned men tell us that all forms of life develop from the simple to the more complex organism, and in like manner our dwellings have

[1] "We meet with many small buildings, or remains of larger erections, now inhabited by the agricultural labourer, but in nearly all cases it will be found that the houses had originally been tenanted by those whose social position was far higher." Turner and Parker's "Domestic Architecture," Vol. III., p. 22.

[2] Blount's "Law Dictionary," 3rd edition, 1717.

changed from one or two large rooms to a greater number of very small rooms. Whether this is altogether an advantage does not concern us now. The result has been that many moderately-sized houses have been sub-divided into two or more tenements, and the "row" of two or three old cottages which we often see and admire was originally one long farmhouse, in which a large central chamber served as sole living-room for the farmer, his family, and labourers, and one or more smaller rooms at each end served as sleeping accommodation for all the household, and for storage of food. Often in such cases a single chimney-stack of old, thin bricks in the middle of the "row" indicates clearly that it once belonged to a single tenement. That applied to the larger holdings of a parish; but before the days of Inclosure there were very many small holdings, of a dozen or more acre strips, scattered throughout the common fields. The effect of inclosure was to replace these small holdings by larger farms, upon which the small-holder became a labourer; but it is admitted that, although inclosure produced more food in the country as a whole, it diminished the number of people who were drawing a scanty subsistence from the soil. The single cottages which we now see, therefore, were often the homes of small-holders who were more or less compensated by the Inclosure Award for the land which they surrendered, and then became wage-earning labourers.

Even in pre-inclosure days there were labourers who possessed no more property than labourers possess to-day, but their homes were built of the rudest materials[3]—clusters of mud-built huts, which had no second room. These have long since perished or have been re-built, so that, for the most part, the

[3] "The shattered hovels which half the poor of this kingdom are obliged to put up with, is [sic] truly affecting to a heart fraught with humanity." N. Kent: "Hints to Gentlemen of Landed Property," 1775, p. 229.

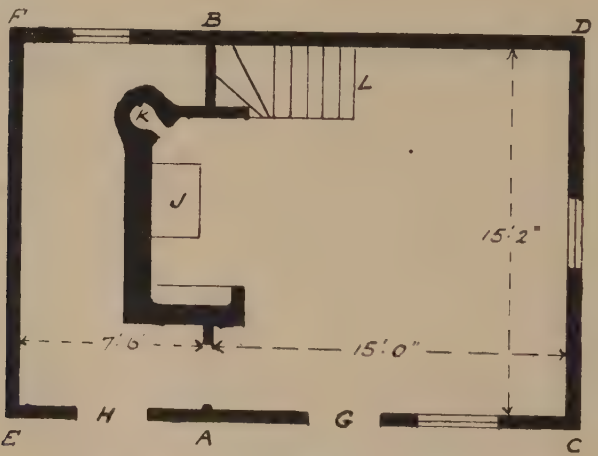
cottages which remain to us from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are the former houses of small-holders, copy-holders, and occasionally of comparatively rich free-holders, content to pass their simple lives in a dwelling which was comfortable indeed (according to the standard of that age), but allowed little opportunity for that privacy which is valued rather highly to-day. A good deal of smoke in the living room, stone floors, and abundant draughts were features common to all houses, great and small, in those days.

The tendency to increase holdings continued after the passing of the Inclosure Acts, and a comparison of the number of farms in a parish before 1810 [4] with the number to-day often shows a remarkable decrease has taken place in the last century. In Weston Turville the number of farms has fallen from 14 to 9 or 10, and there are at least four farm-houses which have been separated from their land. One has been made into two tenements, the others remain undivided at the moment, though one of them has held two tenants since the house was parted from the land. Examples are frequent of cottages which have always been single tenements, but it is often doubtful whether they were originally built for landless labourers.

The accompanying ground-plan is typical of many timber-framed cottages in Weston Turville; although carefully and accurately drawn from one particular cottage it is not complete for that building, which has been added to at various dates. The design is simple, consisting of one living room (A B C D), with an open hearth (J) and a bread-oven (K) at the side of it. A staircase (L) leads to two bedrooms overhead. The living-room occupies precisely one bay,

[4] As set out in an appendix to the "General View of Agriculture of Buckinghamshire," by the Rev. St. John Priest, 1810.

(a term which will be explained on a later page), but the cottage extends a further half-bay behind the fireplace (A B E F) forming a useful store, which is often called the "back-'us'." It is usual to find also that the rafters on the side (F B D) have been continued to within a few feet of the ground, so as to form a room outside the wall of the house. Mr. S. O. Addy (in his valuable book called "The Evolution of the English House") uses a North-country word for this space—"the outshut." It is a word which the present writer uses and will use in this chapter for convenience, but it is not used in Buckinghamshire. The total length of 22½ feet, or thereabouts, for this building may be found over and over again in the Vale, and there seems little doubt that a cottage of a "bay and a half" was a standard size in the seventeenth century.



Ground Plan of typical Timber-framed Cottage of Seventeenth Century.

Perhaps a better example of a true labourer's cottage is to be found at Bishopstone, where there is a small

wichert[5] building which comes to the edge of the road. Externally it is 28 feet long and 15 feet wide, but the house proper is only 19 feet long, and the end of the building is a kind of small barn or, perhaps originally, a stable which cannot be entered from the cottage. The walls are about 15 inches thick, and the one living-room is 10 feet square. Between this and the small barn, or stable, is a store-room without window. The fireplace is on the north-east side, and beyond it is a small "outshut." Above is one bedroom. Wichert is as difficult to date as the rubble and flint-work often to be found in the Chilterns; it is made of a local limestone-mud mixed with chopped straw, and is applied in layers, precisely as the house-martin builds his nest. Where there are no timbers or original fittings, such as windows, it is almost impossible to give the age of the structure, as one can in the case of the timber-framed buildings which are found up and down the county, and owe their ubiquity to the fact that experience proved them most suited for withstanding the contraction of a clay soil. In the far west of the county (as at Marsh Gibbon), or in the north (as at Castlethorpe or Sherington), stone may be sufficiently accessible to have been used structurally, or for the mullions and labels of windows, but it is almost certain that few of the houses which are stone-built, in whole or in part, were originally designed as cottages in the narrow sense of the word. By "stone" properly-dressed stone, or ashlar, was meant, for rubble cottages are not uncommon in the limestone end of the county. There is a singular group which boasts the unromantic name of "Ram Alley," standing in a meadow at the

[5] This is unusually far north and east of the wichert country, which lies chiefly at Haddenham, with a few examples at Cuddington and at Dinton. The Historical Monuments Commissioners do not record the Bishopstone cottage, probably because they could find no direct evidence of a seventeenth century origin; it is possibly from 100 to 150 years old.

south end of Stoke Goldington. The Historical Monuments Commissioners rightly assign them to the seventeenth century, but speak of them as only five in number; this may be the correct number of separate buildings, but some are, and always have been, two tenements apparently. The living room is 17 feet long and 16 feet wide, and has an open hearth 6½ feet wide, with a bread-oven in the corner. Beyond is a second room of almost equal size, and a continuously chamfered ceiling-beam appears to run through both rooms and supports the two bedrooms above.

The timber-framed house (or cottage, as we know it), such as we saw in ground-plan, has a very interesting history; in its earliest form it consisted of two pairs of curved timbers known as "forks," or "crucks," with their uppermost points joined by a straight piece of timber which formed the ridge of the roof. In our county no building of this simple type exists to-day, although these words are being written in a house which contains one pair of such forks still in position,[6] but there are several examples of the next stage in the development of this form of construction, where the tie-beam bracing the "forks" was extended to the width of the "forks" at their base. The accompanying illustration of a cottage at Cuddington explains this method of construction better than any technical description, the horizontal projection being at a different level from the tie-beam suggests a modification of the original structure Another example at Newton Longville is illustrated by the Historical Monuments Commissioners. At a later period the curved principals, having no justification, were omitted. The interesting point about these designs is that the dimensions continued to be much the same throughout the six-

[6] See Historical Monuments Commissioners' Report, Vol. I., p. 316, where they are said to belong to the fifteenth century.

Photo by *Zelma, Aylesbury.*

COTTAGE AT CUDDINGTON.—(?) SIXTEENTH CENTURY.

teenth and seventeenth centuries; the "forks," or the upright timbers which succeeded to them, were about 16½ feet apart, though in Buckinghamshire this distance is very often 15½ feet. In any case it has a relation to the "five and a half yards—one rod, pole, or perch" of our school days. It was, in a word, the space needed to house two pairs of oxen.[7] The span of the "forks" is more variable, but 16 to 18 feet is a usual length. This arrangement of timbers formed a "bay," and was such a recognised unit that in old documents a building is commonly mentioned as "of so many bays," and a man might bequeath bays of his house to different sons. The word "bay" is still invariably applied in speaking of barns, but the matter will be considered more fully when we discuss barns.[8]

With this very rough idea of the skeleton of the house, we may now consider its construction more closely. The foundations of rubble, large flints, etc., were brought about 18 inches above the ground-level; upon this rested horizontal timbers, or "ground-plates," on which stood the upright principals of the bay. Their tops were joined by a tie-beam across the bay and by another horizontal timber which joined the ends of the bay and formed the wall-plate, and the rafters carrying the roof rested upon the wall-plate. The upright and horizontal timbers were often braced together with curved struts, and similarly in the roof the principal rafters were braced to wall-plate or purlin. As the upright principals could not exceed some 12 feet or so in height it was necessary that the upper floor should be partly in the roof, and the ceiling be formed at

[7] For the evidence supporting this see Mr. S. O. Addy's very interesting work on "The Evolution of the English House, 1905, p. 66. On p. 29 of the same book the development exhibited by cottages such as that at Cuddington is explained and illustrated.

[8] See p. 48.

the level of the purlins. The upper floor was carried by a beam which joined the middle of the tie-beam at each end of the bay; this forms the ceiling-beam so general in the downstairs room of these houses, and with its stop-chamfer forms a useful aid to dating the structure.

It is usual to find these timbers in a very roughly-hewn state indeed, and when that goes so far as to leave the bark on the wood it certainly indicates primitive workmanship. On the other hand there was a great advantage in selecting naturally-curved timbers for struts, or in choosing a slightly curved trunk for the sake of the natural camber requisite to withstand the downward thrust of the floor it was called upon to support. It is to this last cause that the great difference in the level of the floor between the middle and the walls of an upper room is due; a difference of 9 inches has been noticed. The meaning of all this was that it avoided cutting timber against the natural grain—a process which must tend to weaken it considerably.

Having now sketched the skeleton of the house it remains to consider the walls. They had no structural value, they carried no weight, and were merely protection from the weather; they could therefore be made of wattle-and-daub, which was the cheapest form of walling before it became a forgotten art, or they could be filled with a brick-"nogging." Not infrequently a cottage is met with exhibiting both forms of wall, for the force of the weather below the line at which the wide eaves afforded protection tended to decay the wattle and daub, and the lower divisions of the house may be found filled with brick of varying sizes (indicating the various dates at which it was inserted), whilst the upper panels retain their original filling, which was certainly an efficient non-conductor of heat.

The horizontal timbers had grooves throughout their length with holes every six inches or so; into these holes and grooves rods were fitted, and interlaced with osier so as to form a kind of basket-work (the "wattle"). The "daub" is said to be identical in composition with the wichert mentioned above, but Mr. F. G. Gurney learned from a man who had actually made it that pure clay and straw-chaff, cut rather longer than chaff for fodder, were used, mixed with cow-dung, which gave it a delicate greenish tinge, still visible in old daub at times. Whether the walls be made of wattle and daub or of brick they are broken into panels four feet wide by the insertion of small timbers ("studs") between the principals.

Roofs in the Vale are generally of thatch, and where these have been replaced with tiles the pitch of the roof will generally indicate that it was originally constructed for straw, because thatch cannot be successful if the pitch of the roof is less than 67½°. Straw will only last if the rain runs rapidly off it without soaking in too much, and this can only be if the "stulches," or layers of straw, are evenly and tightly packed, and the angle of the roof enables the water or snow to pass off rapidly.

When both labour and straw were cheap, thatching was probably preferred as the most economical covering for a house. Although that is no longer true, it certainly remains the best possible non-conductor of heat; unless near to the draught from a window, water does not freeze under thatch, nor is the heat in summer nearly so oppressive as underneath slates or tiles.

Thatching is always done by the "square," consisting of 100 square feet. The owner of the building provides the straw, the withies and string, and very often a man or boy to "yelm," or draw out the straw

and damp it for the thatcher's use. The withies may be cut from willows or from the black poplars which are generally grown near the house for that reason. In calculating the area thatched the tape is carried from the point under the eaves at which the new thatch begins, right over the ridge of the roof, to the point on the other side at which the new thatch ends. In measuring entirely new thatch (that is, thatch applied to the bare rafters) the area is doubled.

A roof with hip-ends forms two triangles which, if corresponding, are assumed to form a rectangle and calculated accordingly. Anything projecting at an angle, such as a dormer window, should be avoided in thatch; it rapidly decays at the line of junction between the two surfaces. When the top of a window comes just under the wall-plate it is usual to raise the thatch in a gentle curve above the level of the roof so as to shoot off the water without obscuring the light. Thatch well made of good straw (1921 was a good straw year, 1922 a bad one, shorter and more brittle) may last 12 to 15 years with attention to the ridge, to the points at which the chimney-stack comes through the roof, and to the angles exposed to the worst gales. As time passes the straw decays and consolidates, so that it is not possible to provide satisfactory guttering which will carry off the water at all stages of the thatch's life.

The chief enemies of thatch, after the weather, are birds—particularly starlings, who burrow in the eaves and draw out single straws—and rats. In a week a rat, if un-noticed, may do a very great deal of damage to a roof, making extensive runs which cause a sinking and destroy that perfectly even surface which is necessary to prevent rot from the accumulation of moisture.

The presence of a thatched roof is always seized upon by insurance companies as an excuse for putting

up the rate of insurance. That a row of thatched cottages is in more danger of catching fire than a similar row which is tiled—may be granted, but an isolated cottage can hardly be particularly inflammable or one would not see so many which have stood for three centuries unscathed. It is seldom that sufficient water-supply is available near to a thatched cottage, and there was probably much reason in the old contrivance of fire-hooks for pulling down a roof which had become ignited. A pair of old fire-hooks on poles which may be 15 or 20 feet long stand in the tower of Hanslope Church; at the lower end is a ring to which horses might be fastened when the hook at the upper end had been imbedded in the thatch.

Apart from the actual construction there is not much to guide one in dating these cottages; the fireplace has always been an open hearth 7 or 8 feet wide, and about 3 feet deep, with a seat on one side and a bread-oven on the other. It is rare indeed to find one nowadays on which the dog-irons are still used; wood is not always so readily procurable, and the ease with which a hundredweight is burned in an evening is remarkable. In the Vale and away from the beeches the commonest wood is elm, which is not the best to burn on an open hearth without coal. From the æsthetic point of view there is nothing to approach a great wood-fire burning on the hearth; it has its practical drawbacks, the worst undoubtedly being the ease with which smoke puffs back into the room when the wind is in a particular direction. By partly covering the huge yawning mouth of the chimney and constructing a "hood" over the actual fire this is sometimes corrected, but the truly open hearth is often only successful if there is a strong inlet of air (which means a thorough draught) into the room. In less fastidious days than these, people were probably less affected by the irritation caused by smoke, and they ignored the

draught by drawing a high-backed settle round the fire. Where there was no settle a fixed screen, at right angles to the wall and close to the door, afforded some protection. It is usual now to find the open-hearth holding an open kitchen-stove, with a diminutive oven on one or on both sides; this enables coal to be used, and with a "blower" hanging from the mantel-beam the risk of smoke is reduced, but, on the other hand, pots and kettles become very black; they are hung from an adjustable pot-hook, which, in turn, hangs from a chain fastened to a bar across the chimney a few feet above the mantel-beam. It was an advantage of the open hearth that it was scarcely allowed to go out; the ashes, when raked over in the morning, contained a few embers, and with the help of a little small wood, or "kindling," and a pair of bellows it was the work of a few minutes to obtain a blaze. Those were the days of truly roasted meat—on a spit before the fire. An old man living on the hills at Hyde Heath told the writer that he always kept a store of dried cow-droppings, and that one of them placed on the embers in the morning and blown with the bellows soon provided an excellent means of grilling a rasher of bacon, which was laid upon it. The policy of using a valuable manure for fuel was as reprehensible as the practice appears to us unhygienic.

Cottage staircases are very seldom contemporary with the house, the explanation being that they are eighteenth or nineteenth century replacements of some primitive kind of step-ladder which was the original means of access to the upper storey. When one sees a solid oak staircase it is certain that the structure containing it was never built as "a labourer's dwelling."

Windows are very seldom contemporary also, even when they are coeval with the house they have often been moved there from elsewhere; the nicely wrought-

iron catch and neatly made lattice were only to be found in the best type of house, though they may now be seen in a much humbler abode.

Seventeenth-century houses never had fitted cupboards, and when we speak of the ample number of cupboards in a "good old" house we are not carrying our memories back further than two centuries.

It was sometimes the practice to build one bread-oven for several cottages (there is, or was, an example of this at Chilton)—one can hardly imagine a more fruitful source of quarrelling between neighbours.

An important factor in the preservation of old cottages is continuous ownership; thus if an estate continue for many generations in one family (they are few to-day), generally speaking there is a tendency to preserve old buildings; they are not suffered to fall into such hopeless disrepair as necessitates their destruction. On the contrary, divided ownership in a village implies that many of the properties will rapidly depreciate through the poverty of the owner, or through his rapacity in adding to his income by neglecting repairs or by so altering the building to increase the rental as to destroy its character. The "small builder" owner is a particularly bad example of the second type of owner common in many villages. If a defect occurs in a cottage he repairs it with any kind of material he may have at hand, and will even sink to the baseness (it should be made a misdemeanour, if not a felony!) of replacing thatch with galvanized iron.[9] In very recent years a great many estates have been broken up by sale to the sitting tenants, and in the course of a few generations this will have a bad effect in changing the character of the property so acquired.

[9] There is a bad example of this close to the cottage at Newton Longville referred to above; it lies just south of the Schools and Manor House.

CHAPTER II

FURNITURE AND FITTINGS

A woaken bedstead, black an' bright,
Did teäke my weary bwones at night.
An' then we had vor cwoats an' frocks,
Woak cwoffers wi' their rusty locks.

T. Barnes: "*Woak wer good enough woonce.*"

There would be no end to this paper if we let our subject carry us into private houses, nor does it seem quite fair to describe what is not available for any reader to see, so we will confine ourselves generally to the two kinds of buildings where the public is always welcome,—Churches and Inns (this term covering beer-houses or other premises not fully licensed).

Furniture in Churches

The Commissioners, who so shamelessly despoiled our churches in the sixteenth century, probably took care that nothing in the way of movable furniture was left; there may not have been very much, in days when the officiating priests used the stone seats which still remain in many chancels and are called "sedilia." Whatever may be the reason, we have little which is older than the seventeenth century. At Bierton there is a chair dating from the early part of that century; it has an elaborately carved panel back and curved arms, and is very well preserved. At Astwood and at Clifton Reynes are similar, but inferior specimens. Of later chairs there is abundance; two of outstanding beauty of carving and with velvet covered seats are at Emberton, and there are several in the Kidderminster library, attached to

Photo by *Walshams Ltd.*

COFFER IN PITSTONE CHURCH. XIIITH CENTURY.

Langley Marish Church, with cane-work seats. A chair which looks quite out of place in a church is one with cabriole legs and claw and ball feet, at Lavendon; it seems to date from the reign of Queen Anne, and is interesting as an early example of the use of mahogany.

The chairs, however good, are equalled by many in public or private keeping, but in the case of coffers the churches win easily. At Cublington is a coffer which is said to belong to the late twelfth or early thirteenth century; it is 7 feet 3 inches long, but only 12 inches from back to front, and 2 feet 6½ inches high. The front "standards" are 9¾ inches wide, and have the semi-circular "cable" ornament on their feet. There seem to have been about ten iron bands in front originally; two still remain, and, considering its great age, the condition of this coffer is good.

A still better preserved coffer, said to date from the thirteenth century, is at Pitstone; it is very different in shape, being 3 feet 6 inches wide and only 2 inches less from front to back, and as it is only 2 feet 7 inches high it has a very square appearance. In these very early coffers there was no morticing, the ends were let into grooves cut in the front and back, which are massive slabs two inches thick. The front consists of three boards, the outer ones being 15½ and 14½ inches wide, while the middle one is 12 inches. Short iron bands are arranged at intervals to cross the meeting of any two boards. There is an indication of ornament in the shape of deeply-cut circles on the feet. The thought that this coffer may have been fashioned when Henry III. was reigning is somewhat staggering.

Of later coffers and chests there is a fair number of various sizes. None are of very wonderful workmanship except in the very interesting church of North Crawley, where there is a chest of the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century; it is five feet long, and 25

inches high; the front is divided into three panels, and the rails and styles are carved. The panels have an inlay, and the two middle styles have a banding of light and dark inlay.

At Wingrave is a good chest with panelled front and a curved lid; it bears the names of Thomas Brooks and John Quarindun, churchwardens, and the date 1684 cut in the lid.

In the neighbouring church of Aston Abbots is an interesting chest, rather high for its length (3 feet 2 inches), with a rounded lid on which are three broad hinges with fleur de lys ends. The front of the chest has two elaborately moulded panels, and on the lid is the inscription: "This chest was erected in Mr. Roger Hitchcock's [1] time, Minister, Thomas Hedges, John Hobs then churchwardens, 1695."

In the tower of Radclive Church is a very remarkable chest, made of mahogany, and no less than 4 feet 9 inches long, 2 feet 6 inches high, and about as much from back to front. There are brass-straps at the corners, and elaborate brass-handles, and hasp and escutcheon; the lid has four "wired" hinges. The lower part has two drawers, in the way of the piece of furniture sometimes called a "mule." The chest is made of very dark mahogany, and must be an early example of the use of that wood, if, as is likely, it is of late seventeenth century date.

There is a very interesting chest in the north chapel of Newton Longville Church; it is only 3 feet 3½ ins. wide, 2 feet 1 in. high, and 19 ins. from front to back. The front is divided into three arcaded panels, separated by styles on which figures are boldly carved; the sides are panelled. The Historical Monuments

[1] Roger Hitchcock died in 1705 after holding the living since 1673, when he succeeded his father, Robert, who had held the living since 1622. This means that there were only two Vicars in 83 years with a possible interruption during the Protectorate. This is certified by entries in the parish register. See the volume issued by the Bucks Parish Register Society, 1912, p.p. 28 and 41.

Commissioners ascribe it to the early seventeenth century, but it might belong to the end of the sixteenth.

Up to about 1858 there was in Edlesborough Church "an ancient vestment box made from the trunk of a tree, scooped out inside, but rough in the exterior, and bound with bands of iron terminating in rudely-formed lilies."[2]

Beaconsfield, which has two good chairs, one dated 1663, has also a very interesting iron chest, with a lock and two padlocked hasps, and with landscapes painted between the iron bands which cross the front; this is the only early chest of iron known to the present writer in the county.

There are several good communion tables. One at Padbury is dated 1634; another at Stoke Hammond is dated 1619; this has six legs, but the top is not original. At Dinton a communion table in the south aisle bears the inscription "Geven by the youth of Upton," and the date 1606. At Ivinghoe, in the south transept, is an extremely beautiful table, 4 feet long and 27 inches wide; the legs are ⊥ shaped, and are braced to the frame of the top by elaborately-carved and pierced brackets; while the stretcher which joins the legs at the bottom carries a "balustrade" of four round-headed and carved arches, the sign of early Jacobean work. If anything can be said against this table it is that it is almost too elaborate in its carved detail. A contrast is formed by another table in the north transept of the same church; this is slightly longer and narrower, with a shelf beneath, but apart from its "barley sugar" or "corkscrew" legs it is plain to the point of severity; it probably belongs to the close of the seventeenth century. In the small church of Hulcott is a table with carved legs and a sliding top; it is an early seventeenth

[2] "Records of Bucks," Vol. VII., p. 177.

century piece, and came out of Sir J. Dashwood's mansion at Halton. It was presented by the late Julian James.

In the chancel of Weston Turville Church is an extremely interesting, though not perhaps a rare piece of furniture; this is a table-bench, the back being hinged and turning over on to the arms so as to form a table. The seat of the bench is 44 inches long and 1 foot wide, and the back, when horizontal, forms a table top about 45 by 28 inches. When upright the back shows two panels decorated with round-headed arches somewhat elaborately carved; these, as was said above, are typical of the work of James the First's time. The other, or table side of the back, is entirely plain, and the legs and supports of the arms are quite plainly turned.

In Ashendon Church are two plain joint stools of the middle seventeenth century; these are often called "coffin stools," and it is quite likely that these particular ones were so used before the present bier, which may be a century or more old, was available. The stools are a pair, 21 inches high, with tops 17 by 10½ inches. At the present time (July, 1923) the church is undergoing a process of overhaul, when this is completed it is to be hoped that the two stools will stand near to one another.

Cupboards are not common. Dinton boasts of one which is very large indeed, and bears the date 1612. At least a century earlier is the famous vestment cupboard in the north transept of Aylesbury Church, with its swinging brackets for carrying cassocks and surplices. Some happy fate has preserved this ugly but useful piece of furniture for the particular benefit of the deep-voiced verger, who never wearies of calling attention to its merits, generally in the same words.

The purely ecclesiastical woodwork, such as the poors boxes at Whitchurch and Bletchley, must not

detain us at present, as our concern is with furniture which might also be domestic.

Inn Furniture and Fittings

Although publichouses often change hands in these days, much which is in the rooms open to the public goes with the house under the protection of an inventory; the older and more interesting pieces have long been exchanged under the persuasion of the dealer or collector, but something remains here and there which luckily has little market value. Settles are certainly the most imposing pieces; they are generally painted, but this is the less to be regretted, as they are more often made of elm or deal than of oak. They are generally curved rather than straight, a necessary arrangement in a room with an open hearth and a door which is often the front door of the house. As William Barnes says:

> An' there wer then, our girtest pride,
> The settle by the vier zide.
> Ah! gi'e me, if I were a squier,
> The settle an' the girt wood vier.

The back is often at such an angle with the seat as to make it very restful. Some day we shall learn again what we are in danger of forgetting, that upholstery is not nearly so important for comfort as proper construction; the modern arm chair will then have its arms at the right height for support without dislocating one's shoulders. Occasionally there are two settles, their ends abutting on the jambs of the hearth opening, and their other ends far enough apart to make an opening to the charmed circle where the fire blazes. This arrangement of settles may be seen at the "Shoulder of Mutton," Little Horwood, an interesting example of a sixteenth century house. Inside the settle is often to be found a small round table on three legs; this kind of table is very common, and seems to give a good deal of

strength with the smallest amount of material, which is or should be the joiner's aim. Occasionally the top of the table is three-cornered, with the corners chamfered off so as not to catch anyone passing. A table of this kind in an inn on the extreme border of the county has a second shelf underneath, and a drawer below that; the top of the table has a strip of wood round it, projecting slightly above the surface and preventing pots from being pushed off by some clumsy arm. There is something snug and sociable about these little tables which is very attractive; they are generally well made, better than the long, narrow table which is still more common. This is primitive, but extremely strong, having **X**-shaped legs with a stretcher joining the centres of the two crosses, and struts from the stretcher to the under side of the top, which often has an iron band round its edge. This is practically a repetition of a very early type of trestle table, and the persistence of the design proves its usefulness. Tables of this shape often have lines cut upon them in a kind of draught board arrangement, which was used in the game of "shove-ha'penny;" a blow on the edge of the table was needed for this classic pastime, and a table needed strength to stand such treatment. There were other mystic games of skill in which corks and a Georgian penny took the place of skittles. Stress is laid upon the date of the penny to prove that a current coin of the realm was not being used. Still another game played on these long tables was played with a cork standing upright in a circle, the size of a quart pot's base; upon the cork rested a farthing, and a coin thrown at the cork had to jerk the farthing outside the circle drawn on the table.

Nearly all of the open hearths are now more or less closed in, though many may be found with a low "basket" grate; in one Vale inn a large kettle may

always be seen hanging above a fire of this kind by the usual pot hook and that ingenious contrivance for keeping one's hand unburned and fairly clean, sometimes called a "lazy back." By the side of the fireplace, grate, or open range may sometimes be seen the conical tin or copper vessel for "mulling" ale. At the "Boot and Slipper," Buckland Common, is a wide, open hearth with a basket-grate standing on ordinary fire-dogs. A mulling-tin hangs up in the hearth. It is more usual nowadays to set the pot upon the hob without addition to its contents. This leads us to the sad decay in the use of pewter pots. It is a time-honoured adage that "porter ne'er tastes so well as in its native pewter;" but Fashion curiously preferred those wretched vessels of glass which have a distinctly German appearance. The high price of these glass mugs and occasional scarcity of beer during the war made one hope that the pewter which had escaped the melting pot would be revived. It was a great opportunity for a licensee to enforce the use of the unbreakable pewter pot while his glass mug rivals displayed the dismal legend "No beer,"—but they let the chance slip, some basely admitting that it was because of the "extra labour" of scouring the pewter.

Domestic "labour-saving" is generally the cry of the lazy or the incompetent, the very last people to make any good use of the time they save by omitting some household duty. To have back our old beer would be a blessing second only to the restoration of a gold currency, but at least we might, by means of pewter or even the good blue earthenware mugs with brown pattern on them, do something to conceal the thin liquor which passes for beer to-day.

There are two fittings fairly common in inns; one being the bacon rack, a shallow tray formed by wooden slats hung a few inches below the ceiling; three sides

are fixed, and the fourth can be moved and forms a door. There is no workmanship in these racks, and they are merely interesting as speaking of times when we were more dependent upon home-killed pigs than now, when we sell the pig and buy dear and inferior bacon. There is a bacon rack in the "Golden Cross," Long Crendon, which measures 60 inches by 39 inches, and is 8 inches deep (inside measurement). There is a door at one end, and it is fitted in the corner of the room, the walls forming two sides of the rack.

In the "New Inn," Thornborough (which bears 1688 carved on the staircase) a bacon-rack in the tap-room was filled with bacon 27th Sept., 1922. This was a crude affair of two or three horizontal spars hung on hooks from the ceiling.

The Manor House kitchen in the same village contained an enormous bacon-rack with large doors (and well filled, too); it does not seem very old—early nineteenth century perhaps.

The bacon-rack in the "Rose and Crown," Aston Clinton, is well and rather elaborately made. It is 59 inches long and 57 inches wide, with a door in one side. For several generations the house was held by a family named Clark, who were also butchers, and were famous for their bacon and hams. Many hooks remain on the walls to-day. It is not quite typical of the ordinary bacon-rack.

The second fitting is far more interesting; this is the spit rack over the mantelpiece, made of two pieces of wood fixed to the wall, and about four feet apart, each of which has several deeply-cut notches in it, forming a kind of wooden hook. For some unaccountable reason they are always called "gun racks," though how they could have held the barrel, much less the

stock of a gun, nobody will explain.[3] Their real purpose was to hold the long steel spit upon which our wise forefathers skewered their joints and roasted them before a great fire,[4] for which process our baking in ovens makes a poor apology. The present writer admits that he has never seen a spit in the county, nor anywhere *in use* except in the noble kitchen of an Oxford College. Being useful pieces of steel, they have probably served for other purposes. There are two very fine spit racks at the "Bell," Aston Clinton, each having four notches about 3½ inches deep, and 1 inch across at the mouth; they are 46½ and 52 inches apart respectively, and one rack in particular is cut with some attempt at character in the work. Much earlier (say late seventeenth century) is a spit rack at the "Royal Oak," Aston Abbots, where there are three brackets which are 31 and 32 inches apart. Each contains three notches, and the mantel board is between the first and second notches; this is apparently intended to afford central support to spits which were between 5 and 6 feet long. At the "Seven Stars," Broughton, in the parish of Bierton, are two brackets with one notch each, and 62 inches apart. Probably there was originally an intermediate one, as at Aston Abbots. At the "Seven Stars," Weedon, is a spit-rack of unusual design, the notches being formed of : ⊣ shaped projections, with their vertical ends 1 inch apart. The two brackets

[3] Mr. N. J. Shirley Leggatt, of Little Missenden, has been good enough to make accurate measurements of (1) a Joe Manton, 1820; (2) a T. W. Fry, 1810; and (3) a modern gun. In each case the muzzle is within the one inch limit represented by the notch in the rack, and the grip is only fractionally larger, but the length from the end of the muzzle to the centre of the grip never exceeds 37½ inches.

[4] See, for example, Herrick: "A Panegyric to Sir Lewis Pemberton."

> The wholesome savour of thy mighty chines
> Invites to supper him who dines,
> Where laden spits, warp'd with large ribs of beef
> Not represent but give relief.

are 48 inches apart, and there is accommodation for two spits.

In a sixteenth-century house in Whitchurch, the residence of Mr. T. Loader, there are two brackets, 55 inches apart, with only the top notch remaining out of three originally there. This is a well-carved and most interesting example, placed above a very fine fireplace.[5]

At the "Talbot," Loughton, is a spit-rack consisting of two brackets 4 feet 6 inches apart with three notches, which are somewhat larger than usual, and measure one-and-a-half inches across at the opening.

At the "Chequers," Fingest, is a spit-rack; the brackets are 49 inches apart, and have four notches each.

A good example of an apparently early spit-rack is to be seen at the "Crown," Cuddington. There are two deeply-cut notches in each bracket, and the brackets are 48 inches apart. In the "Bell," North Marston, are two brackets 56 inches apart with two notches each.

An unusually large spit-rack, used later to hang up guns, or perhaps one should say, blunderbusses, was in one of the kitchens in Stowe House, above a large, open range. In another kitchen was a still larger fireplace, with a smoke-jack apparatus and six spits, which must have been 6 to 8 feet long each; they were hung up, however, and were not on brackets.

Luckily the spit-rack is quite without value away from its original setting, so that there is no inducement to the wildest collector to gain possession of this curious relic of other days, the very use of which has been forgotten.

Late one winter night a year or two ago the present writer happened to be near to High Wycombe with

[5] The Historical Monuments Commissioners give a full-page illustration of this fire-place, but in their text speak of a "gun-rack;" so that even the expert is not free from this vulgar error.

many miles still to walk. It was a wild night, cold, wet, and so dark as to make the usual line of the tree tops invisible, and the cheerful light from the window of a roadside inn offered a temptation which it would have been folly to resist. It may have been that very picturesque house known as the "Harrow," for it was in the neighbourhood of Bryant's Bottom. Anyhow, as he drew nearer he heard a chant, the tune of which is unforgettable, though long unheard by the traveller outside in the wet.[6] He stopped with his finger on the latch while a fresh but deep voice struck up:

All along, all along, all along, all along,
All along, all along, langterloo
(Repeated)
Langterloo, merry go down,
Twice fifteen is half-a-crown,
Half-a-crown, I lay it to you,
The very next stroke shall be thirty-two.

Amidst the hubbub which followed the counting he entered, and saw two men sitting at one of the long, narrow tables which have been mentioned above, each holding a piece of chalk, and making a mark on the surface of the table as he intoned the ditty. To win, it is necessary to make exactly thirty-two strokes. It was a pleasant scene, suggesting past and happily more simple times.

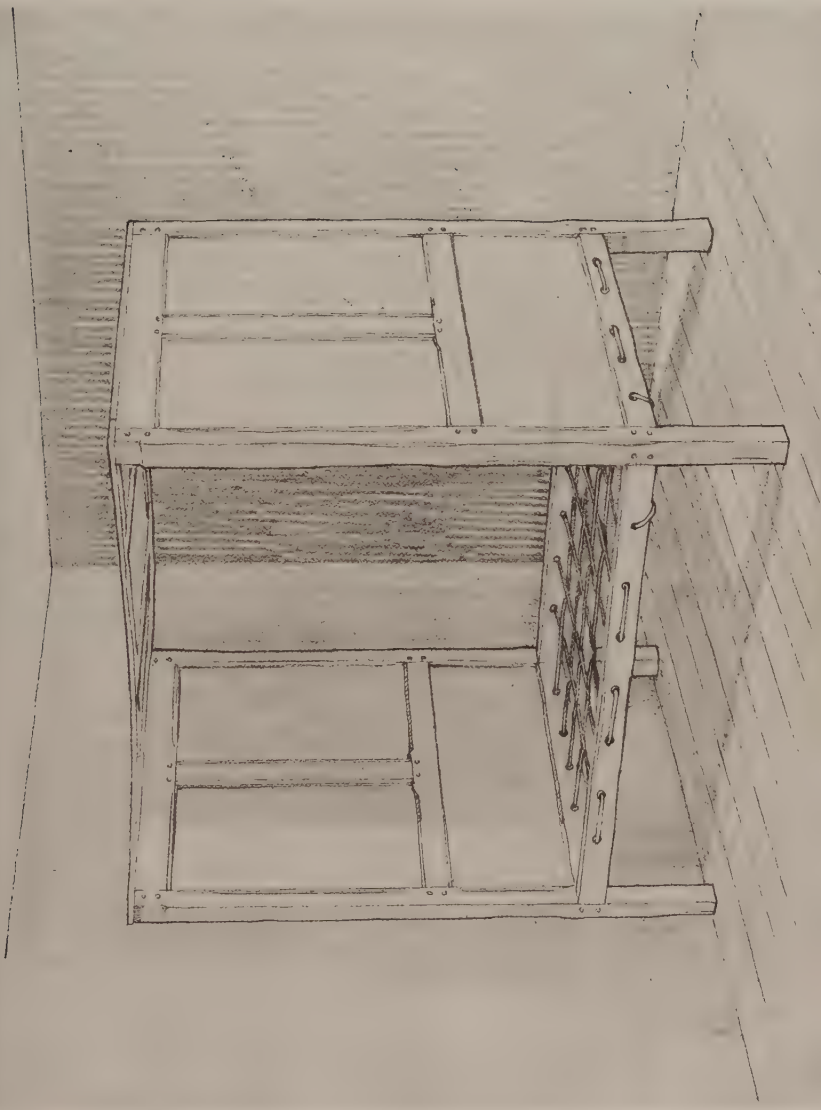
One piece of furniture which is to be found neither in church nor in inn, it is true, deserves to be noticed here as an exception to the rule laid down at the beginning of the chapter.

The almshouses at Great Linford were built by Sir William Prichard, who died at the beginning of the eighteenth century; his widow added to the benefaction, and among other things each of the six tenements contains a bedstead of oak, with panelled head and

[6] The sophisticated reader will at once recall the introduction of this game in English literature. Mr. Hardy brings it into his wonderful description of Giles Winterborne's Christmas party, in "The Woodlanders."

foot, and top which is not panelled, but serves to brace the ends. It is 6 feet long and 4 feet wide, and is well calculated to add to the warmth and comfort of the aged inmates.

The accompanying illustration gives some idea of the appearance of one of these bedsteads. The writer is indebted to the Rev. H. Andrewes Uthwatt, rector of Great Linford, for bringing this most interesting piece to his notice, and he sincerely thanks Mr. A. V. Elliott for his very careful and accurate drawing.



CHAPTER III

MOATS

Moats will afford you fish, fence, and moysture to your trees; and pleasure also, if they be so great and deep that you may have swans, and other water birds.

WM. LAWSON: "*A New Orchard,*" 1660.

There are few more distinct and suggestive relics of bygone days than the homestead moats which are so liberally scattered about our county in various states of preservation or denudation. Only in one or two instances have the buildings which they were made to protect been retained, and it is impossible to date them closely. The Norman castle always had strong outer defences in the shape of deep fosses and high ramparts, but it was not until the thirteenth century and onwards that ordinary domestic houses were moated.[1] This was partly because until that period there was no class of people with property sufficient to justify the means of securing it. In towns the existence of a community afforded such safety, but in the country the franklins could only acquire and cultivate the land when the times were comparatively quiet and peaceful. These franklins, the true yeomen, were the great makers of moats; depending for protection not upon great depth or width, but upon the presence of water, for even if it were of no great depth it proved a formidable obstacle so soon as a fair layer of mud was deposited at the bottom.

[1] A. Hadrian Allcroft, "Earthwork of England," p. 457. The present chapter owes much to this great work.

It follows from this that moats are most frequently found in the vale where water is abundant, or easily obtained; but directly that has been said one calls to mind the exceptionally large and well-preserved moat which stands 520 feet above sea level at Grove Farm, Ashley Green, near to Chesham, and is said to be the site of a manor house belonging to the Cheyne family. This is an extremely interesting example, because it contains a building which is partly of the 15th century, enlarged in the 17th century, and the remains of a gateway; these buildings stand in a second, inner moat, which is in the north-west corner of the larger moat, so that the house must have been protected on two sides at least by two moats, which still hold plenty of water throughout the year, and by a wall now represented by the fragment of gateway already mentioned.

A wet moat at a still higher elevation remains at Little Pednor, on the next ridge south of Chartridge; this was originally pentagonal in shape. It no longer has a house upon it, but a small 18th century farm stood just outside it until in recent years it was absorbed by a large and ambitious house.

Beneath the western escarpment of the Chilterns, where so many springs arise to form tributaries of the Thame, moats occur very frequently between, say, Edlesborough and Princes Risborough. Starting at the northern end of this line, there is a very large stirrup-shaped moat at Church Farm, Edlesborough; within its area is a dovecot, mentioned in Chapter VII. The moat is well supplied with water from a spring at the north-east end. There is also a very fine stirrup-shaped moat at Pitstone. It is wide, and encloses a considerable area on which there is room enough for a good-sized house of 18th century or later date, though interior timber-work gives evidence of a much earlier house on the site. The island is now reached by a brick bridge, close to which a fine willow overhangs

the water, and, with a copper beech in the background, produces a picture of great beauty. Mr. F. G. Gurney believes that this moat originally belonged to the Neyrnuit family, and like the Edlesborough moat, is probably of the thirteenth century.

Within two or three miles of Pitstone a quiet lane, which leads from Marsworth to Long Marston, runs on the north edge of a large square-shaped moat, now choked with bullrushes and meadow-sweet, which may be picturesque, but destroy the idea of protection which open water gives. The island is cultivated as an orchard, and the modern house is outside it altogether. To-day the islands of our moated sites are often turned into peninsulas by partial filling in of the moat, or by the building of a permanent bridge or causeway, so that the isolation originally attained by a drawbridge which was raised at night is overlooked.

South of Marsworth we continue through a chain of parishes which contain a large number of moats in various stages of preservation. At Drayton Beauchamp, to the north of the church, is what appears to be a very large double-moated site. Both islands are grass-grown meadows; in the one lying nearer to the church is a cottage of the eighteenth century, possibly re-using older material, which may have been derived from another mansion of the all-powerful Cheynes, which stood here and was not demobilised until 1760. In the adjoining parish of Buckland is a very fine rectangular moat with its eastern arm prolonged somewhat, it is said, for the convenience of watering cattle. It is possible, however, that this was an incidental feature of the construction of the moat by means of the plough. That this could be done is proved by an account of a moat near Shillington, Beds, "only by plowing and throwing out the moulds,

and making a ware for the horses to go in and out."[2] The moat is fairly clear, and always contains a good deal of water, being seven feet deep in places; the island is now used as a garden, and during cultivation the foundations of the house which formerly stood there have often been found, opposite to the present entrance. This moated site illustrates very well the fact that the earth excavated in making the moat was always thrown on to the island, the level of which is therefore considerably above that of the surrounding "mainland."

In Aston Clinton are the well-defined though denuded remains of a moat some 80 yards square, and consequently containing nearly an acre and a half; the western arm is the best preserved, and the ditch at that point is about 70 feet across. This moat is upon a farm which is called Vaches, so perpetuating the name of the de la Vaches who held the manor at the close of the thirteenth century.

In Weston Turville two sides remain of each of two moats; but at the Broughton end of the last-named parish are the remains of a very extensive double moat, now much effaced by filling in, but said to have guarded the site of a building belonging to the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem. Foundations and other portions of an important building have been found, and are incorporated in the farmhouse some quarter of a mile south of the moats, which are now meadow land. Quite close to the Broughton moats, but in Bierton parish, is an extremely interesting moat at Broughton Manor; this has originally been a double-moated site, but only the inner moat is now wet.[3] The island is

[2] "The Faithfull Surveyour," by George Atwell, 1662, p. 89. Mr. F. G. Gurney, who owns this interesting little book, kindly drew attention to this passage.

[3] This place was granted to the Abbey of Missenden by Hugh de Gournay at the end of the twelfth century. The Abbey held it until the Dissolution in 1538. (See "Victoria County History," p. 324.)

small, being only some 25 or 30 yards across; it contains a house which is apparently of the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries, re-built at various later dates. The great importance of this moat lies in the fact that it is in perfect order, and, being below the level of the adjoining mill-head at Broughton, water flows through it continuously, the outflow passing underground into the mill-tail. Access to the island is gained by a wooden bridge, which is fixed, but has a door in the middle, so that when this door is shut the house is as effectually shut off from the outer world as it was in the Middle Ages.

Moat Farm, Stoke Mandeville, retains three sides of a moat, with a late sixteenth-century house still standing on the island; the south-east arm of the moat has been filled in and forms part of the farmyard. Between this farm and Brook Farm an extremely small square island stands in a meadow surrounded by a very wide moat, now dry. The island is by far the smallest of those which are mentioned in these notes, and it is only because the best authorities classify it as a homestead moat that reference is made to it at all.

There are several remarkable moats in the parish of Ellesborough; one at the place known as Nash Lee is rectangular, the eastern side adjoining a brook which forms one of the tributaries of the Thame. The island of this moated site is now planted as an orchard, and the moat itself was used for growing watercress some years ago. At Grove Farm, some few hundred yards south-west of Nash Lee, is an ovoid moat, now planted as an orchard; the only building upon it is a pigeon-house, which is described in Chapter VII. Except for a small part at the south end this moat is well preserved, though not holding much water in the summer. Another moat, rectangular and of good size, is at Marsh, close to the footpath from that hamlet to

Bishopstone. The moat is rushy and the island is grass-grown, and to-day there is no building near to this site, which must once have protected a place of some importance. The fourth moat in Ellesborough parish is the most remarkable of all, from the fact that it is a double one, and because one island still retains an inhabited house which has stood there since the sixteenth century. This is Apsley Manor Farm, which stands on the larger of the two islands, and is surrounded, except at one corner, by a good deal of water throughout the year; the second or north-western island has no buildings on it now, and is planted as an orchard. At this end there is less water, and the moat is more filled with rushes. Apsley is situate well below the 300 feet Ordnance datum, and must always be a swampy situation, but the moats help to drain the island and keep the house dry. The south-eastern limb of the larger moat has been partly denuded, but the only approach to the house is on this side through a covered way in a barn, originally contemporary with the house. This barn rose directly from the side of the moat, and illustrates well the defence afforded by the old means of construction, for the barns and stables were on the outside of the rectangle, in the midst of which stood the house, with their blank walls towards the moat. Anyone, therefore, who attempted to enter the house when the drawbridge was up must first cross the moat and then be faced by the wall of some outbuilding, except at one entrance, where doors formed a further obstacle to any intruder.

Going further into the Vale, there is a well-preserved square moat adjoining the churchyard at Hulcott; the island is now planted as an orchard, but the moat is fairly clear, with a good deal of water in places; the eastern side of the island is raised considerably above the level of the water.

Another large and important moat is at Denham Lodge, near Quainton; a seventeenth-century house stands on the island, and is said to be on the site of a former manor house.[4] A beautiful spring of water rises on the north side, and its overflow feeds the moat. The house is reached by a brick bridge, but a gatehouse on the island side of the moat, and of the same date as the present house, marks the position of the drawbridge which used to be there. These buildings prove that the objection to confinement upon an island did not exist three centuries ago. An imperfect rectangular moat, one limb generally containing water, marks the site of a former house at Hogshaw; of the adjoining church only a few worked stones in a cowhouse remain. Whether the house perished along with the church during the Civil War is not clear. A moat of the horse-shoe, or nearly circular shape, lies far from any dwelling, but nearest to Aston Mullins; the footpath from Aston Sandford to Ford passes by it, and there is generally a fair amount of water in it throughout the year.

The best idea of the defensive value of a moat to a strongly-fortified place is furnished by Boarstall, where a rectangular moat, obliterated on the east side, and the magnificent fourteenth-century gatehouse alone remain to bear witness to the past grandeur of Boarstall. The bridge by which the gatehouse is now reached is a stone structure of the eighteenth century, but the former drawbridge can be imagined when one crosses it and sees the grooves in the gateway arch, in which ran the portcullis, working in conjunction with the drawbridge, and forming an additional means of protection.

The moat at Quarrendon is as imperfect as the ruinous remains of the chapel hard by, and merely

[4] The existing house is supposed by Lipscomb to have been built by the Winwoods (Vol. I., p. 404).

indicates by its enormous size the greatness of Sir Henry Lee's stately house, of which no trace remains.

In the far west of the county three sides of a rectangular moat are at Chetwode, opposite to the modern house which stands on the site and bears the name of the "Priory." Except at the west end there does not seem to be much water, and the island has been turned into a truly beautiful flower garden, showing a profusion of colour and forming the gayest of our moated sites by far.

At the extreme north-eastern corner of the county, and within a short distance of the Bedfordshire boundary, there is an interesting group of moats at North Crawley. About a mile to the east of the church is a hamlet known as East End, where there is a large moat, containing a good deal of water in places; the island is an orchard, now overgrown and a wilderness; on it stands a large stone-built house, which has been uninhabited since the Wilmers left it sixty years ago. It forms, indeed, the most melancholy of our moated sites, for the house was built in the seventeenth century, when the art of building comfortable and charming manor houses was well understood. This one deserves a better fate than the gradual decay which seems to threaten it. The second moat at North Crawley lies to the north of the church, and perhaps half a mile from it; it is called Moat Farm, and is a good example of a sixteenth-century timber-framed house, with a very pleasing exterior. The interior has been much restored, but retains some interesting doorways with carved spandrels, and stone fireplaces with moulded jambs. A spring issues through a pipe at the south-eastern corner of the moat, and forms the water supply of the house; it is strongly impregnated with iron, and the bed of the moat is deeply tinged with red for some distance. The third moat lies still further north,

about one mile from the church at a spot known as Up End. A footpath runs close to one side, and it might well be overlooked, as a dense growth of willows and alders covers the banks all round. When one is on the island, however, its stirrup-shape and large size appear clearly. There are several fish ponds within the area, which is grass—and thistle-grown.

The large rectangular moats, well filled with water, and close to the solitary little church of Tattenhoe (between Whaddon and Bletchley) show the site of the manor held by the Staffords throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

All homestead moats in the county have not been recorded. For instance, the three following examples are not marked on the Ordnance Map, or mentioned by the Historical Monuments Commissioners, or in any book known to the writer. Some quarter of a mile south of Beachendon and west of Eythrope Bridge there is a well-defined square moat. The island has sides about 130 feet long, and the moat, though silted up and shallow, is wide, and was probably fed by the Thame, from the bed of which it is but a few yards distant. Owing to floods it must have been a dangerous site.

Another moated site is between Weedon Hill and Bierton, but south of the brook, and probably in Bierton parish. It is much effaced, but the ditch is clearly defined, and the island is above the level of the surrounding old pasture; it measures 55 yards by 30 yards.

A third unrecorded moat is quite near to "The Plough," Hillesden, and appears to be a very large moated site, at least the ditch on two sides remains. This is in the meadow between the Gawcott road and "The Plough." On the opposite or eastern side of that pleasantly-placed seventeenth-century house the ground in the adjoining meadow has also been dis-

turbed at some time, though there is less appearance of a homestead-moat in the lines of the ditches. It is possible, though unlikely, that some of this digging may not be earlier than the Civil War days, though the earthworks in no way resemble the ramparts thrown up at the west of Hillesden Church by the defenders of the house.

Although a complete list of moats in the county might be five times as long, the 30 mentioned above are sufficient to illustrate the various types. They may be classified as follows:—Square or rectangular, 24; round or stirrup-shaped, 6. Only seven of the islands are inhabited; but thirteen retain houses, or at least buildings, and seventeen are meadow land or orchards. The abandonment of moated sites may be attributed to the limitations of an island when the security which it affords was no longer necessary, and to a mistaken notion that such a site must be damp. Although forming the most peaceful of scenes now, moats suggest to us the disturbed days when they were dug; and so well were they conceived and constructed that not all our patent catches, steel safes, spring guns, or burglar alarms are anything like so effectual in safeguarding property as the fathom or two of water—and mud—which in good truth turned our forefathers' houses into castles.

CHAPTER IV

WATER-MILLS AND WINDMILLS

'Our time be a-most gone by,' said the miller. . . . A faint hollow whistle came up over the plain, and I saw a long white cloud of steam miles away. 'That be th' express. It be that there steam as have done for us. The big London mill as be driven by steam does the most of the work.'

R. JEFFERIES: *"Round About a Great Estate."*

Providence is not a profiteer, and it is good to think of the forces of Nature—running brooks and rustling breezes—which have been pressed into the service of man, and cost him no more to-day than at any time in the world's history. As all other forms of power, locked up in some combustible substance, *do* cost him a great deal more—it would seem that he has here an excellent chance of keeping down costs. Unfortunately there are many factors to counteract this advantage, and there is least demand for Nature's power just at the time when it should be most valuable. The power, it is true, is at the mercy of a spell of drought or calm weather, but it is the working of economic laws which has cast a shadow on the prosperity of water-mills and windmills.[1]

At the time of the Domesday Survey there were in Buckinghamshire some 130 mills; they formed a

[1] The former windmill at Wendover was converted to steam power because the building of houses near to it affected the currents of air. The late Mr. F. Purssell, the miller, said that there was great difficulty when the wind shifted suddenly into an opposite quarter, and the sails started to revolve backwards. The sails had to be wound round by hand to bring them into the wind again. The windmill standing, but disused, at Quainton had a steam-engine installed when it was built, to provide alternative power; T. J. Parker: "Quainton Fifty Years Ago," 1915, p. 28.

valuable asset in the manor, as all the tenants were obliged to have their corn ground in the manorial mill. All these mills must have been driven by water, though the power must often have been very low indeed; it is certain, at all events, that there were no windmills, as the most careful researches fail to prove the existence of a windmill until at least a century after the Domesday Survey was made.[2] Sir Henry Ellis, one of the earliest editors of Domesday Book, says that "wherever a mill is specified in Domesday we generally find it still subsisting;" and a more modern authority on Domesday tells us "it is possible that in most villages there is no more ancient trace of man's handiwork than the cut which supplies the mills."[3] Although it is probable that mills were constantly re-built on or about the same site, we have curiously few old structures left in our county. The report of the Historical Monuments Committee only deals with buildings older than 1700, and mentions only three water-mills in Bucks: one at High Wycombe, "possibly on the site of one of the Wycombe mills" mentioned in Domesday Survey, and containing "re-used timbers of early mediæval date;" another is the Town Mill at Amersham, which was "built at the beginning of the XVIIth century, or possibly earlier;" and, thirdly, Lords Mill at Waterside, Chesham. Outside the hills there appears to be no water-mill of so early a date, and the only other mill of 17th century date is the windmill at Brill, of which more will be said presently. A careful inventory was made by the Marquis of Buckingham, when Lord Lieutenant, which showed that in 1798 there were in the whole county 83 water-mills and 21 windmills. The decadence of milling in modern times may be roughly measured by comparing Kelly's Directory

[2] R. Bennett and John Elton: "History of Corn Milling," 1899. Vol. II., Chapters 12 and 13.

[3] A. Ballard: "The Domesday Inquest," 1906, p. 172.

of 1869, which gives a list of 105 mills however driven, with the Directory of 1920, in which only 50 appear. Of these, 32 are wholly or partly steam-driven and lie outside our present enquiry, 17 are water-mills, and there is one windmill.

The water-mills might be divided into three groups, those on the Ouse or its tributaries, those on the Thame and its tributaries, and the remainder among the hills on the Chess or Misbourn, or in the Wycombe valley. Many of these mills appear to have been built or enlarged during the latter part of the 18th and early part of the 19th centuries when the great awakening of English agriculture took place. The passing of the Inclosure Acts largely increased the total area of corn grown, though it reduced the actual number of growers. Production increased faster than the means of transport; those must have been the palmy days of milling when Crabbe could write: "Proud was the miller, money was his pride," and Tennyson could "see the wealthy miller yet."

The coming of steam changed this completely; the mill which did not depend upon a sufficiency of water or of wind could work with all the advantage of increased turnover; and the mill which was out of touch with the railway was at a disadvantage. The great importation of foreign wheat cheapened the loaf until the making of bread at home became the exception, thus reducing the local call upon the miller's services. The mere fact that stone-ground flour makes both more nutritious and more palatable bread than that made from roller-ground flour goes for nothing; there are fashions in food as well as in finery. Just prior to the war there was a revival in the taste for stone-ground flour, which brought custom to some of our water-mills. Government control laid certain restrictions on this, however, which had a discouraging effect upon the miller. The small local mill to-day

is more occupied in making barleymeal, in splitting beans, or in crushing oats than in turning out wheat flour for human consumption; and the recent introduction of small oil-engines on many farms has dealt a blow even to this modest activity of the small mill. It is very difficult to gauge the output of our smaller mills; the power available is influenced by the actual quantity of water coming down, which may be affected by rainfall and by land drainage. Then there are other factors to take into account, such as the amount of clearance for the water in the tail; unless it runs freely away beneath the wheel the water acts as a brake upon it.[4] Again, the main driving-wheel, which is keyed on to the axle of the water-wheel, or of the sail-beam in a windmill, must be in proper ratio to the pinion of the shaft which turns the grinding stones; then the dryness of the grain, and the fineness of the meal required, make a great difference in the output. Speaking very roughly, it may be said that a sack of wheat can be ground to fine flour by one pair of stones in about half an hour; a windmill in a gale might do it in less time.

Generally speaking, water-mills in our county are driven by overshot, or at least by breast-wheels; the smaller mill in Amersham still works with an undershot wheel, and, until it was removed in recent years, Lords Mill, Chesham, already mentioned, was driven by a narrow wheel of very great diameter, to which water was fed by an inclined trough so as to form a kind of artificial water-fall, which turned the wheel on the undershot principle. Speaking broadly, the small water-mill may develop anything from 8 to 12 horse-power, and generally has two pairs of stones.

[4] At Calverton Mill, Princes Risborough, the water at the head is 20 feet above the tail, it meets the wheel through a hatch 20 inches wide on a level with the top; the wheel is 18 feet in diameter, but the stream is not clear lower down, so that the bottom of the wheel is in a few inches of water when running, as the water does not escape fast enough.

Photo by *Chapman, Buckingham.*

WOODEN WHEEL OF WATER-MILL—TINGEWICK.

Nearly all the water-wheels are now made of iron although occasionally, as at Ellesborough, the rim of the wheel is made of elm.[5]

The present water-mill at Tingewick is of no great age, but it still has a wheel made entirely of wood; this wheel is 12 feet in diameter, and 5 feet 4 inches wide. It is a "breast-wheel," turning, by a square axle which measures 16 inches in both directions, on winged steel gudgeons, which are secured by iron hoops. The frame-work of the wheel is made of oak, the rim, or "ring," of the wheel is of elm, as are the "starts," or stays, let into the ring, upon which the bucket-boards rest. The buckets consist of two boards; the front one is called the "float," and the back one is called the "sole."

This wheel, by means of the usual gearing, drives two pairs of stones (one "Peak" stones, and the other French burrs). With a good head of water a sack of barley can be ground in one hour by one pair of stones.

Mr. Pollard, the miller, was so very kind as to allow the accompanying photograph to be taken which shows the structure of the wheel; it is to be noticed that the frame-work is wedged upon the shaft or axle, as to mortice it would weaken timbers which are called upon to bear a very great strain.

There is also a wooden water-wheel of a very similar kind a few miles east of Tingewick—at Padbury. This is in a seventeenth-century mill. The wheel is almost the same in dimensions, though the buckets are a little wider. A number of starts lie in the mill to enable repairs to be executed when necessary; they are 2 feet 4 inches long.

The Padbury mill has two pairs of stones, though the wheat-stones are not used now, and the power is

[5] The mill at Whitchurch stands on the site of a former mill, which was "a wooden structure, and worked by a wooden wheel outside the building."—J. Holloway: "History of Whitchurch," 1889, p. 38.

directed to barley-stones and a modern crushing-machine. The stones for making barley-meal, as usual, are Derbyshire stones; the runner weighs 15 cwt., and was renewed about 11 years ago. It has many years of usefulness still before it. In the wheel-house was a five-pronged eel-spear with the flat prongs curiously close together. It is not used much.

There is a wooden wheel in Wotton Underwood Park formerly used for driving the estate saw-mill; water was brought to it from the lake. It is much more narrow than the mill-wheels at Tingewick and Padbury.

The wooden wheel is a triumph of the millwright's craft, but it is not long-lived, and needs much more attention. The teeth of the driving-wheel are, however, of hornbeam still. A typical iron wheel was found to be 10ft. in diameter and 4ft. 6in. wide, with nearly 40 "buckets" on its circumference. The dressing of the stones remains a highly-skilled operation, and the precision with which the grooves are cut with the double-edged bill or mill-peck must be seen to be believed. The stones known as French "burrs" (formed by many pieces of stones set in plaster of Paris and bound by an iron hoop) are preferred for wheat, beans, and oats to Derby stones, which are apt to "wash," or become concave, in the middle, or "eye," so that presently all the work is being done by the outer edge or "skirt" of the stone, and it becomes necessary to "dress" the stones again, until the ruddled "staff" fails to show any part of the stone higher than the rest. On the other hand, Derby, or "Peak," stones make finer barleymeal. When the upper stone, or "runner," becomes worn it may be turned into the lower, or "bed" stone, which remains fixed. As these stones when new weigh about a ton, they call for a good deal of skill in handling. With ordinary use, stones need to be dressed about every six months.

It is difficult to say what is the life of stones; apparently burrs will last two generations of millers, or more;[6] it has therefore not been possible to say what would be their cost to-day. Peak stones (48 inches in diameter) before 1914 cost about £4 each; they came with the "eye" cut, but were otherwise somewhat rough, and had to be dressed before they could be used.

The hills and woods which add so much to the beauty of our county may make it less fitted for windmills than flatter and more treeless counties nearer the coast. Windmills disused, worked by steam, or in various states of dilapidation, are or were recently at Coleshill, Cholesbury, Holmer Green, Wendover, Bledlow Ridge, Ivinghoe, Cuddington, Long Crendon, Quainton, and Stewkley. The list is not complete, and very few parishes were without at least one windmill, as the number of Windmill Fields, Windmill Hills, and the numerous references in Inclosure Acts, Parish Registers, and other documents, prove. There are remains of an old post-mill at Ivinghoe, in which four brick piers, of no great age, and 4 feet 2 inches from the ground, support two beams at right angles, each being 19 feet 6 inches long, and over 12 inches thick. From the four corners of these beams similar timbers are inclined so as to brace the centre-post at the height of 9 feet from the ground. The centre-post is 8 feet 10 inches in circumference at the bottom, and 7 feet 6 inches above. On the bottom

[6] There are some interesting particulars about mills and millstones in E. Laurence's "Duty of a Steward to his Lord," 1727, p.p. 161-162. He seems to call burrs "blue-stones," and says that they are "cheaper, on account of lasting 40 or 50 years." The prices "as they are commonly sold at the seaside upon the Northern coasts" range from £8: 10: 0 per pair, 40 inches diameter and 12 inches thick, to £20 a pair, 54 inches diameter and 15 inches thick. The Derby, or "grey" stones, as he calls them, varied from £5 a pair (51 inches diameter) to £11: 10: 0 a pair (72 inches diameter). An old miller, to whom the prices were read, thought that they had not altered much in 200 years.

floor of the mill the centre-post has a very beautiful and elaborate moulding; above this the post is only 5 feet 9 inches in circumference. The sail-beam, a stone, and some gear remain in the upper part, but the arms which carried the sails have nearly all gone. Timbers in the building are dated 1687 and 1749, but the Historical Monuments Commissioners do not mention them. A windmill at Loosley Row is in order, but is not worked, while another at Great Horwood is worked partly by wind and partly by an oil-engine; this is a thoroughly efficient mill with three pairs of stones. The venerable mill at Brill, which is the only active wind-driven mill left to us, is really a "post-mill," like the mill at Ivinghoe, the entire mill being fastened to a great upright post, so that with a change of wind it is necessary to move a long lever and so turn not only the sails, but the box-like mill itself. This was clearly a primitive way of keeping face to the wind, with the great disadvantage that it limited severely the space available for the gear, stones, and corn, to say nothing of the miller. The later or "tower" mill is represented both at Loosley Row and at Great Horwood. In this type there is a larger brick building, and the sails are fixed to a cap on the top which turns on a toothed gearing round the tower; a small set of sails, at right angles to the main sails and on the opposite side of the cap, catches the wind if it changes, and so drives round the cap and brings the main sails in the proper position to catch the wind.[7]

[7] The mill spoken of as at Great Horwood is really about midway between that place and Winslow. In the last-named town is an inn of the 17th century known as the "Windmill," with an old signboard fixed to the wall underneath the thatched roof. It shows a man leading a horse and cart to a windmill, which is of the tower kind, with an open "Gothic" door, flanked by latticed windows, while a third window is seen above; the whole is a curious specimen of the sign-painter's art.

The kindness of Mr. Nixey, the owner, makes it possible to give the following particulars respecting the windmill at Brill.[8] The centre-post is square at the base with chamfered corners, and measures 9 feet round its sides; higher up it is rounded and 5½ feet in circumference, diminishing to 4½ feet above. The bottom part of the post used to be open to the Common; a wall was built round it and roofed in 1864. The bottom floor of the mill itself (16 feet by 9 feet 3 inches) contains the bin into which the flour runs, and a recently-placed oat-crusher. To make way for the band which drives the last-named machine, the "16," of the date "1668," boldly carved on a tie-beam which supports the upper floor, has been barbarously cut away. On the floor above are the stones, one pair of burrs for wheat, and one of Peak stones for barley. There is also on this floor a wheat-dressing machine of a modern kind; a slanting box has a wire screen throughout its length; inside this a spindle carrying brushes revolves rapidly and brushes the fine flour through first, then the toppings, and lastly the bran.[9] The sails are of the old type with sail-cloths, which are set by fastening one end to the extremity of the sail and unrolling it from the ground; the sails are each 27 feet long and 5 feet wide, and in a good wind they will grind one sack of barley in an hour with one pair of stones. In this, as in all wind-mills, the main driving wheel is keyed to the sail-beam; the outer rim of this great wooden wheel is acted upon by a curved piece of iron in the manner of a band-brake.

[8] There used to be another mill on the common, and the mound on which it stood can plainly be seen; it is described as a very ancient structure, but was undermined by excavations for limestone, and was destroyed in January, 1906.

[9] The late Mr. F. Purssell, of Wendover, told the present writer that he found it best to let wheat flour stop for a day or two before dressing it through cloths (which was the old way of dressing flour), as it did not clean so well when warm.

By releasing the levers which control this brake the mill is started.[10]

Brill and Loosley Row command two of the most magnificent outlooks in this or any other county. The eye needs time to take in the wide sweep of land beneath, but the water-mill is often set so as to form a perfect little landscape of its own. Even if the banks of the mill-head are kept clear, the sluices and backwaters are sure to have yellow flags, blue forget-me-not, tassels of meadow-sweet, pink willow-herb, or purple loosestrife, making patches of colour among the rushes. Even when the mill is at rest and the sluice-gate is down, there is always some water spouting through to make a pleasant splash on a hot day, a sound with which the call of the moorhens seems well to agree. In front of the mill the water forms a deep pool, often used for sheep-washing before shearing at the end of May. After being well-soaked and pressed with long crutch-shaped poles, the sheep crawl out onto the shallows at one side.

The mere mention of sheep-washing puts one in mind of those very interesting brasses, belonging to the second half of the fifteenth century, in Hambleden Church. They have been disturbed, and are now fixed to an oak board in the north transept, near Sir Cope D'Oyley's tomb. They belong to the family of Shipwash, inscriptions to whom remain, and form a "cant" upon the name, as they represent sheep with wavy lines beneath to indicate water. If they really resemble fifteenth-century sheep the breed was not so

[10] In a gale the trouble was to stop the mill, or, failing that, to keep it supplied with something to grind, and so reduce the frictional heat. Mr. A. Clear, in his useful history of Winslow (published 1894) quotes (on p. 111) from the *Imperial Magazine*, 15th February, 1760: "Near Winslow, Bucks, five windmills were burnt to the ground, occasioned by the high wind, which gave them such quick motion that their axletrees took fire."

despicable then as we are led to suppose, and at least one of the animals might venture into the show ring,—probably in the class for Oxford Downs.

The miller's life is cast in pleasant places; his task is amongst the noblest on earth, for he is the second actor in preparing for the use of man "the staff of life." He and his forebears have sunk a very great capital in the mill, apart from the cost of the mill and its equipment. One shudders at the thought of the expense to-day of making a double dam, perhaps 300 or 400 yards long, and capable of standing the utmost pressure of flood-water. All the more then is the pity that the great potential force thus harnessed should be used to so small an extent nowadays.

The "Windmill" inn referred to in note[7] (p. 44) was observed to have been pulled down completely on 22 July, 1923. It was said by an inhabitant of Winslow to have become "past repair," but ten years ago the Historical Monuments Commissioners, who did not use their words lightly, called its condition "good." It is an example of the way in which facts recorded in these pages may become out of date in the very act of printing them.

CHAPTER V

BARNS AND THRESHING

One could say about this barn, what could hardly be said of either the church or the castle, akin to it in age and style, that the purpose which had dictated its original erection was the same with that to which it was still applied. Here at least the spirit of the ancient builders was at one with the spirit of the modern beholder. . . . . The fact that four centuries had neither proved it to be founded on a mistake, inspired any hatred of its purpose, nor given rise to any reaction that had battered it down, invested its simple grey effort of old minds with a repose, if not a grandeur.

T. HARDY: "*Far From the Madding Crowd*," ch. xxii

The function of the barn was to store the corn when reaped, and to provide space for threshing it. The plan of some of our barns, with "aisles" and "transepts," has given rise to the belief that "it must have been a church;" in reality, the church, as we know it, is the development of the primitive type of homestead,[1] where the barn is the central part, or nave, of a building in which the side aisles are used as byres or stables, while the "chancel" consists of the house-part in which the husbandman and his family lived. There is no building of this type in the county; but it is not uncommon to find one expanse of roof covering farmhouse, barn, and stable.

The internal characteristics of every old barn are the divisions of the roof-trusses, which are called "bays," and the threshing-floor. The word "bay,"

[1] See Mr. S. O. Addy: "The Evolution of the English House," and "The Church and Manor."

we have already seen,[2] represents the space between one pair of upright timbers, or principals, and the next. The bay or bays on one side of the threshing-floor having been filled with corn, the straw when threshed was put in the bay on the other side, and the emptied bay was filled by moving in a stack from the rickyard. It must be remembered that when corn was reaped with a sickle the straw was short; more sheaves could therefore be accommodated than can be done to-day with the modern length of sheaf.

The threshing-floor, according to the very practical "Dictionary of Husbandry," 1793, should be made of clay or cow-dung, mixed together with water, and pressed and beaten down "till all the crevices are filled up; and this must be continued until it is quite solid, hard, and firm." This unattractive floor was not so much used in our county as one made with a kind of sand, but it is not clear how it was made to bind so that the grit was not picked up with the grain; as a matter of fact it was quite hard. A barn of six bays might have two threshing-floors, one of them being floored with oak boards. St. John Priest tells us that "the barn floors in most places in Bucks are protected from the corn by boards raised three feet high on each side of them. There is a convenience in this when the corn is threshing, and when it is dressing, particularly if it is a different grain from that on the opposite side of the floor."[3] It is strange that he does not mention the excellent dialect word by which these sides are known—"mowstead" (pronounced "mouse-ted"), it is worth recording, for while many remain to-day they must disappear in time, and the word will cease to have any meaning.

[2] See p. 7, where the matter is mentioned in connection with dwelling-houses.

[3] "General View of Agriculture of Buckinghamshire," 1810, p. 36.

The flail with which the grain was beaten out consisted of two pieces of wood, the "hand-stake," 3ft. 6in. in length (according to one in the writer's possession), and the "swingel" (soft "g"), which was 2ft. 8in. in length. The swingel was attached by a leather thong to a swivel on the hand-stake, ingeniously contrived by bending a piece of split ash round a large nail driven into the end of the hand-stake. This gave complete freedom of movement to the swingel, and enabled it to be whirled round easily.[4]

At Dundridge, in the ecclesiastical parish of St. Leonards, but still in the civil parish of Aston Clinton, are two barns, each of five bays, and with the mow-steads still in position. Indeed, corn is still occasionally threshed out with a flail, as Mr. Rodwell, the owner, says that cattle take more kindly to freshly-threshed cavings or straw cut into chaff. Formerly he used to keep a "tasker" continuously employed all the winter. The winnowing and cleaning is done with an old machine worked by turning a crank by hand. The hand-stake of the flail in this case is of ash, and the swingel is of blackthorn.

The process of "dressing" the corn referred to by Priest, before the introduction of the winnowing machine, was as follows:—After being threshed the corn was passed through a cavings-sieve, made of split willow, and cleaned by being thrown into the air with a wide shovel which held a peck. A small winnowing-door was always opposite to the great barn-doors to create a draught when opened, so that when thrown into the air the heaviest grain was carried farthest, and the lighter grain fell nearer to the winnower. To throw the corn so as to spread it thinly over the floor, and enable it afterwards to be fanned to free it of light husks, required considerable skill. When cleaned the grain was ready for "making up," or putting into

[4] The word "flail" is invariably pronounced "frail" in Bucks.

sacks which held four bushels. "The operation of dressing was slow," says Lord Ernle.[5] "As the sun streamed through a crack in the barn-door it reached the notches which were cut in the wood-work to mark the passage of time and the recurrence of the hours for lunch and dinner."

The mention of these notches to mark the passage of time suggests the sundials which are cut in the moulded ashlar jambs of a doorway, now blocked, in a late fifteenth century barn at Grange Farm, Towersey. This barn, lying right upon the Oxfordshire border, and in a country which is so flat that every field might serve for a bowling green, is among the most remarkable in the county. It is built of stone, with walls 4 feet thick; at each end are narrow lancet lights, and numerous holes have been made to permit ventilation. There are five bays formed by four pairs of principals set at the unusual distance apart of 20½ feet, with a span of 20 feet; they rest upon large stones, and are 7 feet from the walls on either side, so that there are aisles, though but narrow ones. The roof-trusses are curiously constructed with very massive timbers, the supporters of the purlins resting upon a second beam immediately above the tie beam. Two pairs of large double doors are of much later date than the rest of the building—possibly they are of the eighteenth century—but the whole building is of the very highest interest.

At the same end of the county, but in the parish of Worminghall, is another barn at Wood Farm which bears some resemblance to the Towersey barn, though the walls of rubble and ashlar are not so thick; there is a good deal of dressed stone in its construction. The northern end is used as a stable, but possibly two-thirds of it remain open; it is 24 feet wide, and a pair of doors 14 feet wide is set in a gable on each

[5] "English Farming, Past and Present," 1917, page 357.

side. An oak threshing-floor crosses the barn between these doors, but the mowstead has gone. The roof, of an ordinary tie-beam construction, is not original, as one of the beams bears the date 1722. There are no upright principals, and the tie-beams rest upon the walls. In the walls are square-headed lights, which vary between 3ft. 8in. and 4ft. 6in. in height, and from 4 to 7 inches in width (external measurements). The Historical Monuments Commissioners rather vaguely describe it as "possibly of mediæval date;" there seems no reason to place it later than the fifteenth century. The tiled roof has been brought lower by extending the rafters at various points so as to form outshuts.

About a century later in date (that is, belonging to the late sixteenth century) is the barn attached to the Old Manor House, Addington; it is built of brick with walls 21 inches thick, and the roof-trusses, of which there are six about 13½ feet apart, are carried upon curved struts resting on corbels in the walls, so that here again there are no vertical principals. The end trusses have tie-beams with ornamented struts, and all have braced collar-beams. The plan of the barn was originally in the shape of a cross; the eastern transept has a pair of wide doors in a gable; while on the whole of the western and southern sides and on part of the eastern side the rafters have been continued to within a few feet of the ground, forming outshuts which are used as chaff-houses, calf-houses, and so on. The walls are pierced with two rows of loop-lights, with a narrow external opening and a wide internal splay. Except on the northern and on part of the eastern side these openings can no longer serve their purpose of admitting air, as the outshuts close them. The threshing-floor has been concreted, but the mowstead remains on one side.

At Church Farm, Edlesborough, is another most interesting barn; it dates from the middle of the

Photo by *Walshams Ltd.*

BARN AT CHURCH FARM, EDLESBOROUGH. MID XVITH CENTURY.

sixteenth century, and is a timber-framed structure with a nogging of thin bricks, the timbers resting on a low wall, or plinth, partly of brick and partly of stone. The upright principals which support the purlins are carried on walls of stone which project 7 feet from the walls; a cross-piece ties them to the wall-plate, and the purlins are joined by a collar-beam which is braced to the principal by curved struts. Above this intermediate purlins are similarly connected and braced to the collar-beam. This construction gives far more head-room than if a tie-beam crossed the barn at the level of the wall-plate. It is somewhat similar to that used in a barn of the same date at Harmondsworth, Middlesex.[6] At Edlesborough the bays are about 16 feet long (that is, from one pair of principals to the next), and the space inside a pair of principals is just over 16 feet. The whole building is said to be 180 feet long, and is about 30 feet across; the northernmost bays have, however, been converted into stables, etc., and have a loft inserted of modern date. Formerly there were at least two threshing-floors, one with a pair of large doors on one side and a small winnowing-door opposite. This is in the southern part of the barn, which is now concreted, but the threshing-floor in the middle of the building retains its oak floor and mowstead, the latter being now continued upwards to make a partition.

The kindness of Mr. A. Sharratt makes it possible to give an illustration of the Edlesborough barn; the view is taken from the southern end, and the mow-stead may be seen at the far end.

These measurements are those of a tithe-barn for collecting the bulky income of a wealthy rectory. It is not certain how many of the existing barns in the county were intended for that purpose. The Addington

[6] This is mentioned by Turner and Parker: "Domestic Architecture of the Middle Ages," 1859, vol. 3, p. 167. The same barn was illustrated in the "Field" of 23 Aug., 1919.

barn may possibly have been a tithe-barn; another so called is at Marsh Gibbon Rectory. This takes us back to the Oxfordshire border and the stone country, so we find walls of roughly-dressed stone 2 feet thick, pierced with loop-lights 3 feet high and 4 inches wide. Except that it is not nearly so high, it bears a strong resemblance to the Worminghall barn. The roof, which is thatched, is carried upon a tie-beam with queen-post trusses, which are only 13 feet 6 inches apart; the internal width of the barn is 19 feet 6 inches. The end bays have been turned into stables, or otherwise converted, but the double doors on each side of the middle bay still open upon the threshing-floor with a fragment of mowstead remaining. The floor is of the "dirt" kind, and is perfectly hard, with the appearance of stone. There were no cracks in that part of it which was uncovered at the time of the writer's visit. This barn lies just east of the church; west of it is another barn attached to the magnificent sixteenth century Manor House, one of the noblest houses in our county. The Manor House barn has a low stone wall, under 3 feet high, on which rest four pairs of principals 13 feet apart and 23 feet wide. The end walls are of stone, but the sides of the barn are weather-boarded, and the roof is tiled. It has a tie-beam and queen-post construction similar to the Rectory barn, with a few more braces. If it is of late sixteenth century date, it is at least a century later than the Rectory barn. Other barns in Marsh Gibbon seem to indicate that there was a tradition in favour of queen-post construction of the roof-trusses in that parish, or perhaps it is due to the fact that the trustees of the almshouses at Ewelme, Oxon, are the chief landowners.

At Bottom Farm, Lane End, just under Bledlow Ridge, is an early seventeenth century barn, entirely made of wood, with weather-boarded sides and a tiled

roof. Although boarded sides are less durable than such structures as we have been considering, they were preferred by some for the greater circulation of air which the joints of the boards allowed. The roof-trusses at Bottom Farm barn vary considerably, and are not all original. There are six bays, and the principals are from 13 to 15 feet apart, with a span of 19½ feet. Each of two threshing floors has a large pair of doors set in a gable, so that a waggon can be brought under cover. Opposite to them are also wide doors, and both floors retain their mowsteads. This is the most familiar type of barn, made entirely of wood at a time when wood was cheap. It seems to have been repeated throughout the eighteenth century, though later specimens are less lofty, and generally have a simple tie-beam and collar-beam arrangement of the roof truss. A late barn of this kind is at Manor Farm, Weston Turville; it is of five bays 16½ feet long and 22 feet wide (the length being measured in the axis of the building). On the north side the rafters are brought low so as to add 4½ feet to the width of the barn, and form a small aisle. This barn has an oak threshing-floor raised one foot from the ground, and a mowstead reaching 3 feet above the floor-level. The winnowing door is unusually large, being 3 feet 10 inches wide; it is contemporary with the rest of the barn, and has not been altered since it was used for its original purpose.

The material used in any structure is necessarily regulated by local circumstances; thus we have seen stone barns in the western corner of the county, where stone was easily procurable, and was used for the smallest cottages; we have seen brick used at Addington, and Totternhoe stone at Edlesborough, which is not far from the original home of that famous stone. At Cuddington we may see the wichert, so common there and at Haddenham, used in barns. At Holy-

man's Farm are two small barns, now thrown into one, probably contemporary with the house, which was built at the latter end of the seventeenth century. The barn is only 18½ feet wide inside, and the larger barn before alteration was only 42½ feet long. The walls are 22 inches thick, and the roof (formerly thatched, but now covered with old tiles) is of the common tie-beam and collar-beam construction, the width between the trusses varies, and one of them was inserted when the roof was altered. A much larger barn at Ridgebarn Farm, Cuddington, has a very large transept, with a gable on the east side, carrying a pair of wide doors. The wichert walls are 22 inches thick, as in the other barn, and both barns have triangular openings for ventilation, with the apex uppermost and the sides 12 inches long; these openings are lined with elm boards. In the case of Holyman's Farm barn there is an incised design of interlacing circles which much resembles the sundial at Towersey mentioned above; but it is not easy to see how it could have been used as a sundial, since it is on the *inside* wall, but near to the wide doors.

As regards the cost of threshing with the flail, we have some evidence from Arthur Young. Although he passed through Bucks he does not happen to mention the rate of payment, but at Hemel Hempstead he says that 2s. a quarter was paid for wheat, and 1s. 6d. for barley. At Tring prices were the same, with 1s. a quarter for oats and beans.[7] At this rate a man might earn 6s. a week by threshing wheat. Modest as this sum sounds, it is more than the famous Stephen Duck earned, for the title-page of his Poem describes him as "lately a poor Thresher in a Barn in the County of Wilts, at the Wages of Four Shillings and six Pence per Week," but that was nearly 50

[7] "Farmer's Tour through the East of England," 1771, vol. 1, pages 9 and 15.

years before the date of Young's tour. To come to more recent times, Mr. Brandon, senior, who 50 years ago threshed in the Weston Turville barn which is mentioned above, and is still happily with us, says that the rate of pay was 2s. a day when labour was paid for by the day, and the task was 8 bushels of oats, 6 bushels of barley, and 4 bushels of wheat. Consequently the price per bushel, which Arthur Young showed to be 3d. for wheat in 1771, had doubled inside the century. At the current rate of wages, and supposing that a man could thresh 4 bushels of wheat with a flail in a day, it would cost about 1s. 3d. When threshing was paid for by the day the hours were from 6.30 a.m. until 4 p.m., with intervals for meals. If the allotted task was not performed within this time a corresponding deduction was made at the end of the week. All the old writers on husbandry agree that a thresher's shoes should not be "iron-clouted," or at least should be "soled with an old hat." Mr. Brandon does not remember this being practised, but says that slippers were always worn when it came to "making up" the corn.

Stephen Duck, who has just been mentioned, may not have been a true poet, but he certainly described what was familiar to him directly and faithfully. A few extracts from his "Thresher's Labour" will illustrate this:—

> Divested of our Cloaths, with Frail in hand,
> At a just distance Front to Front we stand;
> And first the Threshall's gently swung to prove
> Whether with just exactness it will move;
> Then, once secure, more quick we whirl them round,
> From the strong planks our Crab-tree Staves resound,
> And echoing Barns return the rattling sound.
>
> * * * *
>
> When sooty Pease we thresh, you scarce can know
> Our native Colour, as from work we go;
> The Sweat, and Dust, and suffocating Smoke,
> Make us so much like Ethiopians look.

> Week after week we this dull task pursue,
> Unless when winnowing Days produce a new;
> A new indeed, but frequently a worse,
> The Threshall yields but to the Master's curse;
> He counts the Bushels, counts how much a Day,
> Then swears we've idled half our Time away.

It will be noticed that he calls the swingel the "Threshall," and that he was working upon day-work, and not piecework. He speaks of the dust, and it is held by some that it was a very unhealthy occupation. It was mostly a vegetal dust, however, and it is mineral dusts which are generally considered to be most dangerous. It was to dust he refers when speaking of "suffocating smoke," but it was the actual smoke of the steam tackle which caused the true use of the old barns to disappear. Where an old barn exists advantage is taken of it to house corn and save the trouble of thatching a rick. In a spell of bad weather this is particularly useful, but the barn is not then doing more than that sorry contrivance (usually of metal) known as a Dutch barn, a structure which may be useful, but can never be anything but hideous, while the material and workmanship put into our old barns make them a work of real beauty. Ruskin had more ambitious buildings in his mind when he wrote, but he could not have found his "Lamp of Truth" burn more brightly than it does in the barn at Edlesborough, for instance; and when a modern architect was shown a sketch of one of the roof-trusses described above he denounced it as a "crude and clumsy arrangement of upright and horizontal timbers." It may be so, but one wonders what appearance his concrete and iron erections will have after they have endured the wear and tear of five centuries?

CHAPTER VI

OLD FARMING WAYS

Who lived in times when not a man had seen
Corn sown by drill, or thresh'd by a machine.

CRABBE: "*Tales,*" *No. III.*

There is no understanding the history and development of English farming without having very clearly in one's mind what is meant by an acre, and although we all think we know this, it is necessary to say that it is a piece of land which is based upon the unit of lineal measurement known as the rod, pole, or perch of 5½ yards. The typical acre is a rectangular strip of land four perches wide and forty perches long, and the long side of this strip, 220 yards, forms a furlong, or "furrow-long," as it was thought a convenient length for beasts to draw a plough before the rest afforded by turning at the headland. The common-field system, which lasted from the earliest feudal time right down to within living memory rested upon the allocation of a number of these strips to tenants who, at first by personal service, and later by a money payment, procured the right to cultivate them for their own advantage.

It was usual to divide the land round the village into three areas, of which one would be under wheat, a second under barley or oats, while the third was a bare fallow, both to rest and to cleanse the land. The farmers held strips scattered through these three fields, so that all had some good and some bad land, and all had some under corn and some fallow each year. The strips were separated from each other by narrow unploughed pieces, which were called "balks."

In addition to the arable land there were rights of pasturage in the common meadow, which was "stinted" to carry a certain number of cattle in proportion to the arable holding. There was also a certain amount of waste land outside the village settlement, though the grazing it afforded was not of much value. Finally, after the harvest had been cleared, the stubbles were thrown open to all the cattle, which might pick a scanty subsistence from weeds and from the grass-grown balks and headlands. It must be remembered that there were no roots, clover, or artificial grasses, so that the complete lack of winter keep caused the cattle to be slaughtered to a large extent, and salted down at the beginning of winter.

This "straggling or scattered ownership, regarded from a modern agricultural point of view, was absurdly uneconomical. The waste of time in getting about from one part of the farm to another, the uselessness of one owner attempting to clean his own land when it could be sown with thistles from the seed blown from the neighbouring strips, the quarrelling about headlands and rights of way, the constant encroachment of unscrupulous holders upon the balks—all this seems as awkward and uneconomical as possible."[1]

At the close of the fifteenth century the growth of the wool trade caused a good deal of the inclosure of the untilled common lands and the laying down to grass of land formerly under the plough. Many Acts of Parliament were passed to check this tendency towards rural depopulation, and the efforts to stimulate corn-growing and keep the people on the land sound extremely familiar to us to-day. In 1517 a Commission was appointed to enquire into this movement, and concerns us because it gave particular attention to Bucks. Not only were conversions to

[1] F. Seebohm: "English Village Community," 1913, p. 15.

pasture reported, but also the "engrossing" or consolidation of farms under one farmer, and the displacement of population and destruction of buildings. As Bucks had been inclosed at an early period to a larger extent than some other counties, the total area which the Commissioners found to have been inclosed since 1488 was only some 9,080 acres, while the number of acres "ingrossed" was 7,905, and 1,131 persons were displaced.[2] At Byrdyston (that is, Burston, Aston Abbots) eight ploughs were put down and sixty people evicted, and the hamlet and manor of Burston was altogether turned into a sheep pasture.

The reporters to the original Board of Agriculture, Messrs. James and Malcolm, estimated that the area then farmed on the common-field system was 91,906 acres.[3] Numerous Acts were passed for the inclosure of particular parishes down to 1838, and still further awards of inclosure were granted under the General Inclosure Acts down to 1857, when 1,350 acres in Cheddington parish were inclosed. Pitstone was inclosed in the same year, and 2,350 acres in Edlesborough were not inclosed until 1865. These dates bring us easily within living memory, that last named being comparatively recent to Mr. Burrows, of Edlesborough, who recently died at the age of 98.

By this time the restrictions had relaxed, and each tenant was at liberty to sow what he pleased or to keep his land as bare fallow. The holdings were in acres and half-acres, which were either freehold or leasehold, scattered far and wide. After the harvest was cleared the fields were open to all, as Clare, the Northamptonshire peasant poet, sings:—[4]

> With groups of restless sheep who feed their fill,
> O'er clear'd fields rambling wheresoe'er they will.

[2] S. Leadam: "Domesday of Inclosures," 1897, vol. 2, p. 584.

[3] "General View of the Agriculture of the County of Buckingham," 1794, p. 32.

[4] "Shepherd's Calendar, October."

All fields were not made open at the same time; the occasion was seized by the shepherds for a "jollification." During the day the sheep roamed about, but at night each shepherd folded his own. Besides his arable land a farmer held the right to turn out so many cattle or sheep on the common pasture, which was called "swade" (query, sward?).

At Cheddington, according to Mr. J. Ashby, of that parish, the lands were nearly all in half-acres. The usual rotation was winter oats, wheat, beans, spring oats. Little was grown in the way of turnips or clover, because of the labour involved in folding upon a small area, which could not maintain cattle or sheep for long. A wooden swing-plough was used, drawn by two or three horses, which were harnessed in line or "single." When cattle were in the common pasture, which was "stinted" according to a man's holding of arable land, and was thrown open from May 6 to Sept. 29 in each year they were looked after by a man appointed for that particular purpose, who was called the "howard" (that is, hayward), his duty being to see that cattle did not stray upon the arable land then under crops.

A faint relic of the old acres and half-acres is still found in the present-day ploughing, where the open furrows between any two "lands" are often four poles, or 22 yards, apart on the soil of the Vale. We are told that the curious terrace formation known as the "Linces" on the hillside at Cheddington, Over Winchendon, and elsewhere in the county, is the result of cultivation by the early village community. It is supposed to be the result of ploughing a longitudinal strip on the hill-side with a plough which turned the earth to the outside of the strip, and, for some reason, returned idle; consequently a spit of earth was removed each year from the upper balk and added to the lower balk at every ploughing, with the final result

that the intervening land became level, and the balks became upright banks of earth. This theory, strongly upheld by Seebohm, is most unconvincing to the present writer, who cannot understand why the plough is assumed to return idle any more than it does to-day, when by an ingenious "turning off" of so many furrows on either side of a central ridge, and by "turning t'ward" (or, more shortly, "t'ording"), so many furrows from the next ridge, the whole width of the land is ploughed with the smallest amount of time lost in turning at the headland.

Mr. J. Hedges, of Cheddington, remembers very well ploughing the Linces in bygone years, and declares them to be very good land, fit to grow better crops than the thorns and brambles which are found on them to-day.

Use of Oxen for Ploughing

Oxen were never extensively used for purposes of draught in Bucks. James and Malcolm say: "It does not appear that oxen are now used in any part of this district."[5] When Arthur Young visited the great Burke (who vigorously pursued the then fashionable craze of farming) at Beaconsfield he found four oxen in harness, and says: "It is evident that the old objection against oxen of being slow has no foundation. In harness they are worked like horses at pleasure, either in pairs or one before another. In yoaks besides the weight on their necks, which is very grievous, they draw unequally, if one ox hangs back, or is in any position except exactly even with his fellow, both must be wrung, and draw in a twisted position in which it is impossible for them to exert their strength."[6]

[5] "General View of Agriculture of Bucks," p. 24.

[6] A. Young: "Tour through the East of England," 1771, vol. 4, p 270.

There are a few cases within living memories of the employment of oxen in the county. Thus Mr. J. Axtell, of Weston Turville, ploughed with oxen (three or four Herefords, harnessed "single"), at Bedgrove, in Mr. T. Morris's day. He clearly remembers driving the team on the day on which Moses Haddo was hanged at Aylesbury—the 25th March, 1854. He says that they pulled more steadily than horses, without jerking, and could do as much work, namely, up to one acre in a long day if the soil worked well. They drew in harness, with collars opening at the top and buckling behind the horns; they were not shod. They were discontinued largely because in summer-time they became "terrified" with flies—breaking away through hedges and generally giving a good deal of trouble.

Mr. Fordham, now of Princes Risborough, used to farm at Little Kimble in the 'sixties; he had two bulls and worked two steers with them, harnessed as at Bedgrove. These also were not shod, but he had no trouble with their feet; though when they had been into Aylesbury with a load they might become "a little tender."

About forty years ago Mr. Denchfield, of Lower Burston, Aston Abbots, had two bulls, each of which used to be placed in harness between an ox and a horse, all harnessed "single." These were shod, two shoes to each foot, and drew an ordinary wheeled plough on very stiff clay ground. This very question of shoeing oxen is one about which a good deal could be said, and the practice varied considerably. Thus Lisle says that "the shoeing of an ox round comes to 16d., but if the inner hoofs behind are not shod (which in our country they need not) four oxen in shoeing are but the price of three." [7]

[7] "Observations in Husbandry," 1757, p. 67.

Marshall strongly advocates the employment of oxen, saying that at the age of six a large, deep-chested ox is equal in strength to a strong, well-made cart horse. He gives elaborate directions for the care of the teams. "Their names must be horse-names. The driver ought to be such a one as can swear gracefully, and bully with an air of superiority; he must be dignified with the name of first carter, and provided with a curry-comb, lacquered on the back, and a brush bound with gilt leather; with these he will take a delight in combing off the dirt—the ox, too, partakes in the pleasure, and shows his gratitude by wagging his tail." [8]

So far as the present writer is concerned, the latest instance of the regular use of oxen for ploughing in the county occurred within the last fifty years at Pitstone, where Mr. Procter, of Church Farm, used a team of three. This is also the only case in the county in which living witnesses remember seeing the oxen draw with a yoke, all drawing abreast. As Mr. Procter is said to have been a very good farmer,[9] he presumably thought Arthur Young's objection to a yoke ill-founded. These oxen were of a long-horned type, and were not shod, but they were never worked on the road.

J. K. Fowler speaks [10] of seeing at Putlowes, near Fleet Marston, 50 Herefords which had been sold for £50 each. "They were 5 years old, worked beast; they had been harnessed to the yoke, and had therefore attained a great size." Mr. Monk, of Sheepcot Hill Farm, adjoining Putlowes, explained to the present

[8] "Minutes of Agriculture," 1783, Digest, p. 49.

[9] A good farmer, according to the agricultural labourer, is one who employs many workers.

[10] "Records of Old Times," p. 101. This is the third, and not the least interesting of J. K. Fowler's three books; though sometimes inaccurate and occasionally led away by the notion of his own importance, he is a writer whom no lover of Bucks can ignore.

writer that the beast which Mr. Fowler saw had been worked on the Cotswolds,—about Moreton-in-the-Marsh, Stow-on-the-Wold, and so on,—and were brought to Putlowes merely to fatten. He added that they would not be salable nowadays, since they might weigh a ton, but they would not be tender.

Ploughing and Ridging

The great problem of the Vale farmer in former days, whether in inclosed land or in the common fields, was to get rid of surface water. Until Smith, of Deanshanger, taught the way to drain deeply (1831) there was no way in general use except that of high ridges; indeed, it is obvious that so long as the common-field system was prevalent nothing more was possible upon such narrow strips. William Ellis, of Little Gaddesden, explains that "ridging up is done by beginning in the middle of a half-land, or half-acre (in which fashion most of all their Vale grounds lie for the greater convenience of carrying off the water), by drawing the plough up and down each side of the middle of the land till the half-acre is all ploughed."[11] While James and Malcolm, 62 years later, say that "though in possession of as fine a loamy soil as is in the kingdom, they plough their lands in a complete serpentine form to the middle of the ridge, which they make so awkwardly high that they become dangerous to waggons or carts, either carrying manure to the land or carrying crops from it."[12] These "serpentine" ridges are known to our veterans who used to plough them as "S-lands." Canon Isaac Taylor attributed them to the employment of a string of eight oxen drawing a heavy plough, and needing so much room for turning at the headlands that they inclined more and more until the ridge gradually

[11] "Chiltern and Vale Farming," 1732, p. 307.

[12] "General View of Agriculture of Bucks," p. 19.

became curved in the direction in which they turned. This theory was accepted, or, at least, quoted, by great antiquaries like De Gray Birch,[13] and Walter Johnson,[14] and by Lord Ernle, who says: "The waving ridges on thousands of acres of ancient pastures still represent the swerve of the cumbrous plough with its team of eight oxen."[15] There are many living in Bucks to-day who could say with Edie Ochiltree: "I mind the bigging o' 't," for they ploughed these ridges sixty years ago, and they unite in laughing at the idea, and say that the ridges were made solely for the purpose of drainage. When asked why water should be expected to run better when the furrow was curved than when it was straight, one farmer of the 'sixties countered the question by saying: "Did ever you know a brook to run straight?" The truth seems to be that the S-lands were made deliberately under the mistaken notion that they would thereby drain the better. As a final reply to the "long team of oxen" theory it may be said that Mr. Burrows, of Edlesborough, who has already been mentioned, often made S-lands, but never saw an ox at plough in that parish. The plough used at Edlesborough had a wooden mouldboard (always called "broad-board," even when the plough is of iron), and no wheels, such as is still in use all through the Vale between Weston Turville and Longwick.[16] It was drawn by two or three horses harnessed "single."

[13] "Domesday Book," 1908, p. 225.

[14] "Byways in British Archæology," 1912, p. 460.

[15] "English Farming, Past and Present," 1917, p. 28.

[16] A plough of this kind is most useful in wet weather, as the soil does not stick as it sticks to an iron plough; it needs some skill in the proper setting so that the ploughman has not to press against the horses' line of draught. It needs more attention, too, than a wheeled plough.

The accompanying illustration shows a bench-end in Haddenham Church, probably of early seventeenth century workmanship, and perhaps indicating, by the plough and wheel carved on it, that the seat was the gift of the parish wheelwright. For the convenience of comparison a modern wooden plough (used at Weston Turville) is also shown, and the similarity in design after 300 years is very remarkable.

The Rev. St. John Priest has much to say against high ridges and "the circuitous form of the furrows," and he begs "every farmer who has ever reflected at all" to remember that "the shortest line between any two points is the soonest traversed by his horses and labourers;" and he provides several wood-cuts to illustrate S-lands and other crooked ridges.[17]

In making these high ridges the soil had all been ploughed out of the furrows, and very little corn grew in the trough of the furrow, which occasionally held anything up to a foot of water.

The amount of work put into the land was very great. Thus Ellis says: "For wheat they plough up the bean stubble in April for the first time, and harrough it down before they plough it again, which is all the harroughing they give their wheat land; then about midsummer they plough it again, and let it lie till the middle of September, when they plough and sow the last time for good. But the more industrious man will give his wheat land four ploughings." For barley he says that they ploughed four or five times in all, but for beans "they give the wheat or barley stubble only one ploughing by casting down the land, and harrough after sowing. This is usually done at Candlemas, according to the rhyming proverb, 'At Candlemas day it's time to sow beans in the clay.'"[18]

[17] "General View of Agriculture of Buckinghamshire," 1810, p. 138. This is the re-written Report to the Board of Agriculture drawn up by James and Malcolm in 1794.

[18] "Chiltern and Vale Farming," pp. 308-9.

Photo by *Walshams.*

BENCH-END—HADDENHAM CHURCH—EARLY SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.

Photo by *Zelma, Aylesbury.*

WOODEN PLOUGH—STILL USED IN THE VALE.

Those whose memory goes back fifty years or more tell of the elaborate ritual which had to be performed when the plough reached the end of the field and had to be turned at the headland. The ploughboy, who was walking on the near side of the team, which was harnessed "singly," went in front and turned round on the headland so as to face the oncoming horses. He held his whip upright in his right hand and touched the near side of each horse as it came up to him with his left hand. If the team were too much inclined to their near side (his right), he would point the whip in the other direction, and cry "Oot back!" whilst if they were already too far that way he would point with the whip to his right, and cry "Aw!" The horses understood this so well that they watched the whip to see whether it was upright or not.

To-day the ceremony is shorn of its glories. The boy continues on the near side of the team. If the horses are too much to the left, he bids them "Gee off!" (sometimes "Gee wut off!"—which sounds like the "oot" we saw above), but if they are already too much on their off-side he cries "Come 'ether!" He keeps near to the "thiller" (the horse next to the plough), and, if necessary, touches the "for'est" (or foremost horse) with his whip to guide it.

Sowing

Although drills of various kinds have been used since Jethro Tull's day, broadcasting by hand was the general practice until the middle of the last century. For this purpose a "seed-cot" (pronounced "sidcut") was used. This was made of a thin, pliable wood, such as wooden measures are made of; it was almost kidney-shaped, so as to fit the body, to which it was attached by two iron rings, fastened to the inside of the seed-cot, hooking on to a belt worn by the sower. On the outer side was a wooden handle with which it

could be steadied. When filled it held two or three pecks, and was therefore fairly heavy. A typical seedcot measured 27 inches in length, 12 inches in width, and 7½ inches in depth. The quantity of wheat to be sown on an acre, according to Ellis, was two bushels and a peck. On fairly stiff land, which is clean and "in good heart," as little as one bushel and one peck may be sown to the acre. If this comes up evenly and escapes from bird and insect pests it will "tiller out" and yield a more vigorous and better yielding plant than if a greater quantity of seed were sown.

Beans were generally dibbled, or "dibbed;" the quantity of seed being one bushel per rood, or one sack an acre. A good dibber could sow a bushel and a peck in a day's work, for which he was paid 2s. 3d. forty or fifty years ago. The holes made by the dibble were closed by being "kicked in."

An early form of drill, or rather horse-drawn dibber, used in the Vale was formed of three cylinders, with spikes, or fingers, projecting; these opened to let out the seed.

Reaping

In cutting corn with a sickle the ears were grasped with the left hand and the sickle was pulled towards the reaper. An experienced reaper would cut sufficient to make a sheaf of two handfuls. The sickle had an edge like a fine saw, and consequently did not require to be whetted with a stone, while the action was the drawing action of the saw, quite different from the slashing action of the fagging-hook, which, however, was more popular in Bucks. Sickles were largely used by the gangs of Irishmen who used to come over for the harvest. With a sickle the ears were cut with a short straw, leaving a high stubble which was mowed later with a scythe. More lazy farmers waited until the stubble had been subjected to frosts, and then

beat it down with poles. This clearing of the long stubble was called "haulming," and the straw so gathered was made up into stacks in the rickyard and used for litter. The advantage of using a sickle was that it cut above the "trumpery" (that is, the weeds), consequently less rubbish was to be found in any sheaf than to-day.

It is not unusual to find the name of Tomlin, of Kettering,[19] which is in Northants, upon sickles used in Bucks. Of some in the writer's possession the larger bear the number 5, and are 18 inches from the handle to the tip, measuring the chord of the arc. The smaller bear the number 4, and are 16 inches across measured in the same way. The tang is driven into the handle through a piece of leather, which protected the forefinger. The design on the cover of this book accurately represents one of Tomlin's sickles.

Barley was mowed with a scythe and never bound into sheaves, but carried loose into the barn, where it was trodden down. Thus Bloomfield's "Farmer's Boy" was

> Oft doomed in suffocating heat to bear
> The cobweb'd barn's impure and dusty air;
> To ride in murky state the panting steed,
> Destin'd aloft th' unloaded grain to tread,
> Where, in his path as heaps on heaps are thrown,
> He rears, and plunges the loose mountains down.

Barley is still sometimes carried loose, because it dries better and makes the grain have a better colour for the maltster. Beans were cut with a sickle or hook. They could not be bound into sheaves at once, but had to be left until a morning of heavy dew enabled the "straw" to bend better to form the bands. Apparently in Northamptonshire the scythe was used for beans, for in his "Harvest Morn" (1818) Clare

[19] There is a reference to this man in the diary of Teedon, the humble friend of Cowper, under date 16 May, 1793: "I writ to Tomlin, of Kettering, about the sheers." The diary is in the Cowper Museum, and was printed by the Cowper Society, 1902.

tells us that the mower's scythe

Then sweeps again 'mong corn and crackling beans.

As regards stacking, it is interesting to note that St. John Priest says that "stacking is everywhere done upon staddles of stone about two feet high, upon which beams are laid crossing each other. Too often the intention is frustrated by the carelessness of servants who leave harrows or ladders against them, enabling mice to enter the stack."[20] This has certainly dropped out of such universal use to-day, though fairly often employed.

Haymaking was a far more elaborate business than it is to-day. It was "made" directly after the mowers, and later put into cocks until thoroughly dry. These cocks could stand a good shower without their inside suffering damage, so that in an unsettled season much better hay was gained.

Rotation of Crops

James and Malcolm say that the rotation in the neighbourhood of Wendover, upon the chalk, was wheat or peas, barley, sometimes oats, and fallow. Upon the clay it was wheat, beans, and fallow.

At Hardwick the leases restricted farmers to three crops and a fallow. The rules were so strictly enforced that one farmer received notice to quit his farm "because he had deviated from the specific terms of his lease in sowing clover." In the next parish, Weedon, which was then all common-field, the rotation was wheat or barley, beans, and fallow, as on the Wendover clays.

But, as the writer of the superficial note upon Agriculture in the "Victoria County History of Bucks" says: "In giving a description of the system of cultivation in Buckinghamshire there is not the four-course shift to start with as a base. No very strict routine is observed."

[20] "General View of Agriculture of Bucks," p. 183.

Cattle and Sheep

James and Malcolm, after speaking of the "amazing fertility" of the Vale, which "soon makes a visible alteration in the appearance of the animal," say "they are grazed about ten months, and then fetch from £20 to £25 each; but when kept longer, as they sometimes are, some have sold for £40. If grass becomes scarce they are finished off with hay, and sometimes a mixture of oil-cake and barley-meal."[21]

This, is must be remembered, was in 1794, at which time "North Wiltshire wethers for stores, and Berkshire wethers for breeding, are the prevailing sheep of the county." The writers add that "until the open fields as well as the wastes shall be enclosed, and the humidity of the soil reduced by draining, it will be vain to think of changing the breed of the sheep." Whether because of inclosure and drainage, or for other reasons, one sees to-day white-faced Lincolns and Oxford Downs, the last perhaps akin to the "Berkshire ewes" mentioned above. They are, at any rate, more tractable than the sheep of our grandfathers; so at least says Mr. Grace, of Stoke Mandeville, who has been shepherd for forty years together, and gave that as the explanation of the fact that a shepherd is never seen with a crook nowadays. Sometimes he uses a crook himself at lambing-time, when, carrying a lantern at night, he wishes to catch a particular ewe. His crook, which he calls a "crutch," is 1⅜ inch at the narrowest part. As a matter of fact, a crook, in careless or inexperienced hands, is a dangerous weapon, as the sheep's leg may be easily broken if not pulled directly backwards in the line of the animal's body.

In the earliest days of arable farming sheep were looked upon almost wholly as manure-carriers rather than as producers of wool and mutton; and this faith

[21] "General View of Agriculture of Bucks," p. 17.

in the flock still lingers, for the great diminution of sheep on arable farms in some parts of the county is held by old men to be opposed to the farmer's interest, for they maintain that the land benefits far more from the folding of sheep upon it than from the application of farmyard manure. In the old days Mr. Burrows remembered a dozen or fourteen large flocks of sheep on the hills round Ivinghoe Beacon; they used to be brought down about four o'clock in the afternoon and folded on the land while "their bellies were full."

Many who admit the great value of sheep in arable farming are prevented from keeping a large flock, it is said, because of the scarcity of good shepherds. A good shepherd is only made by living with his sheep, his observation of them is so acute that he at once notices evidence of tick or blow-fly, and removes the possible cause of much mischief. For this purpose he always carries in his pocket a lump of "mercury stone," as he calls it,—apparently the chloride of mercury commonly called corrosive sublimate. This he keeps wrapped in an old kid-glove, and when he sees signs of the irritation made by the newly-hatched maggots (which develop from the egg in a single hot day), he takes out his "stone," and rubs it on the place, after "spetting" on it. An old copper coin is less efficacious, though sometimes used. He is on his guard against the first sign of foot-rot, and takes very good care that his sheep shall not be "hoven,"—which very easily happens if they are allowed to rush forward too rapidly into a green crop when they are hungry. It is even said that a few heads of "kurlick" (or charlock), snatched when "frim" (or fresh, crisp), and swallowed without being masticated, is sufficient to set up the internal fermentation which distends their stomachs with gas. When sheep are folded on tares or clover, which "blows," or flowers very quickly

under a hot sun, the shepherd allows the sheep to run forward, but keeps them moving; they trample the crop in this way, and he then turns them into the "back-fold" while the tares or clover wither a little and are checked from bursting into flower.

Or a fat sheep may be "cast" on its back, and, if it lie in some depression in the ground, it will struggle until exhausted, or even until it is dead, unless the shepherd's vigilance sees and rescues it.

These and a thousand more sources of trouble give the shepherd a life of constant assiduity; no half-day Saturdays or Sundays off for him. It is only by unremitting attention that a good shepherd is made, and the job which leaves a man with no free hours while he is awake is not the sort of job for which the young man of to-day is looking.

Shepherd Faithful

Memory of the Shepherd's grave on Aston Hill is fast fading, and it may be well to add a few facts to the well-known story. In obedience to his wishes, the shepherd, whose name was Faithful, was buried on the hill where he had so long tended his flock. The turf was cut into letters, which were filled with flints and white stones, the lines (of which there are several slight variants) were given in the first volume of the "Records of Bucks," p. 124, as follows:—

> Faithful lived and Faithful died,
> Faithful shepherd on the hill-side,
> The field so wide, the hill so round,
> In the day of judgment he'll be found.

Only the word Faithful was left in 1847, but the full lines were revived later, as many remember them about forty years ago. Towards the close of the last century the ground was levelled about the time that the Chalet was built, and some three or four feet of earth were removed from the Shepherd's grave. Wishing to see whether there had been a burial

there, the workmen dug a little deeper, and found his skull quite perfect, together with other bones and the skeleton of his dog. There were the nails of a coffin, but the wood had entirely decayed. Mr. John Slade, of Aston Clinton, was present, and saw that the bones were re-interred in the same spot. Both he and Mr. Harding, of Wendover, agree that the bones were under a thick layer of ashes, and they formed the idea that there had been a hut there, erected above a square hole in the ground. Tradition is unkind to Faithful, who is said to have allowed his own flock to mix with the great flocks which used to pass along the Icknield Way at certain times of the year, with the result that his own flock became larger by the meeting. But one refuses to believe such a legend regarding one who chose a resting-place so romantic—in those days.

Horse-driven Churn

Mr. J. Roads, of Broughton Manor, near Bierton, has been good enough to allow photographs to be taken of a horse-driven churn which still stands, though disused. It is hoped that the illustrations are sufficiently clear to make a detailed explanation unnecessary. There is a large gear wheel, from the rim of which hangs an iron fork (not showing in the photograph), which fits upon the horse's saddle; the horse went round in a circle which was from 13 to 15 feet in diameter.[22] This wheel, which is in a building to itself, engages with a smaller wheel to be seen in the second photograph, and this second wheel is on the same shaft as a somewhat larger crown-wheel, on to which is geared a pinion keyed to the axle on which the churn revolves. All wheels are made of

[22] The driving-wheel is 15 feet in diameter, and has 240 teeth; the second wheel has 44 teeth, the third 52, and the pinion on the churn 26 teeth. The churn itself is upwards of 60 gallons capacity.

Photo by *Walshams Ltd.*

MAIN WHEEL FOR HORSE-DRIVEN CHURN AT BROUGHTON, NEAR BIERTON. LATE XVIIITH OR EARLY XIXTH CENTURY.

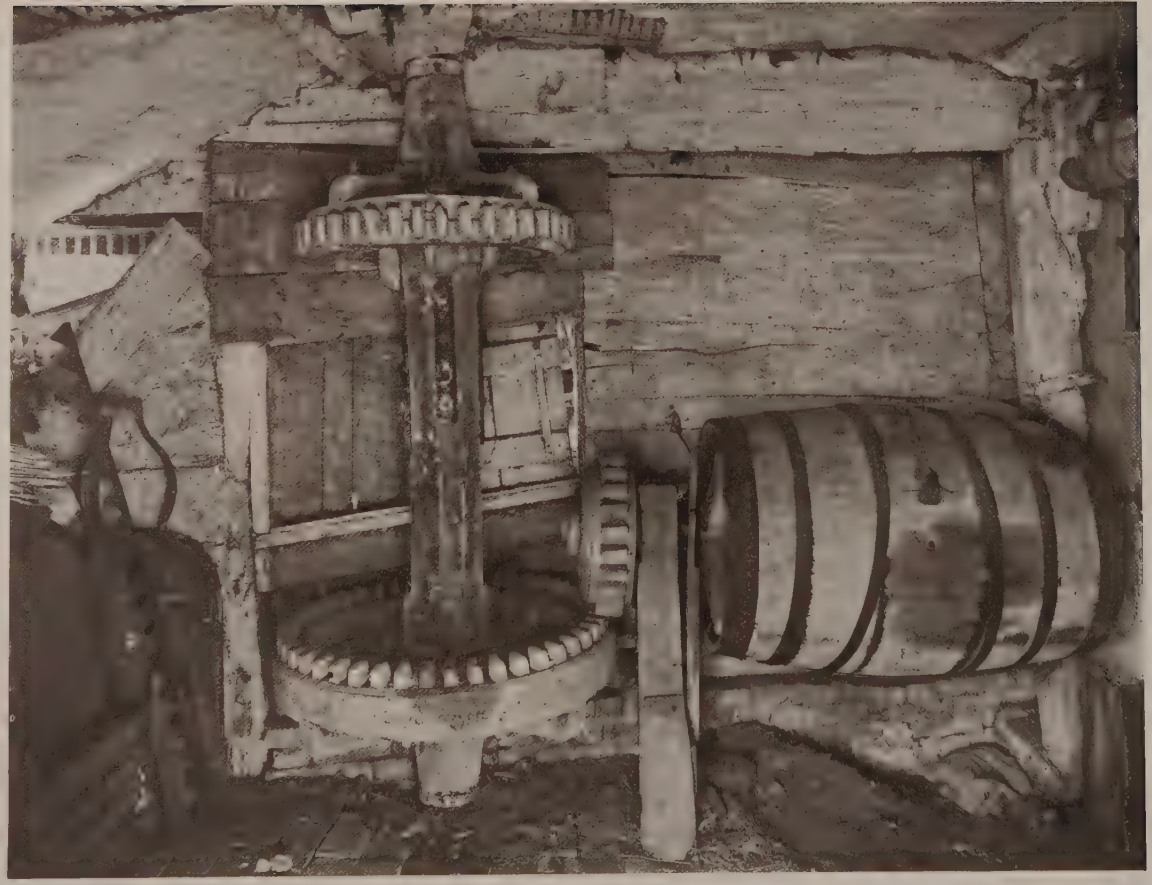


Photo by *Walshams Ltd.*

HORSE-DRIVEN CHURN WITH GEAR AT BROUGHTON, NEAR BIERTON.
LATE XVIIITH OR EARLY XIXTH CENTURY.

wood. It will be seen that only one churn now remains. Formerly there were two, and Mr. Norwood, who still lives at Bierton, where he first went as a young man in 1848, remembers the Broughton churns in use twice a week, with the astonishing output of 46 dozen pounds of butter.

This contrivance is mentioned by James and Malcolm as "lately introduced into some of the dairies. . . . In one instance a bull was made use of for turning the machine, which animal appeared very tractable."[23]

St. John Priest both describes and illustrates the machine, which cost, he says, "about 18 guineas." He gives an interesting figure. "The time of churning varies from 1½ to 2 hours. I stood before a churn in which there were 8 dozen lbs. of butter in the month of November, and accurately examined the number of times in which the churn turned round in a minute, and found it to be 45."[24]

It will be seen from the photographs that the timber alone would cost many times the total original cost, but it is doubtful whether a millwright could be found to-day who would be capable of such skilful and accurate workmanship as is to be found in this instance.

Summary and Conclusion

The outstanding feature in old-time farming which strikes one is the very liberal amount of labour employed in those days. Until 1851 wages were 8s. 6d. a week; and in the 60 years, 1794—1853, wheat averaged 67s. 4d. a quarter,[25] or nearly eight times a week's wages. To-day wheat at 48s. a quarter is little

[23] "General View of Agriculture of Bucks," p. 15.

[24] "General View of Agriculture of Bucks," p. 32.

[25] Average price for 20 years, 1794-1813, was 83s. 3d.; average price for 20 years, 1814-1833, was 65s. 10d.; average price for 20 years, 1834-1853, was 52s. 10d.; average price for 60 years, 1794-1853, was 67s. 4d.

more than one and a half times the value of a week's wages, which, for a ploughman, may be put at 30s. a week. Whether the yield per acre is unchanged is not so clear, but St. John Priest (1810) gives a carefully-reasoned average produce of wheat over the whole county as 24 bushels 3 pecks and 11½ pints per acre,[26] which is not more than the average produce of the present day.

Most likely the land was often cleaner than it is to-day. We saw how Ellis spoke of four and five ploughings for corn, and much later gangs of boys were employed to pull "curlock" (that is charlock), and other eradicable weeds which could easily be picked by hand. On the other hand, the small amount of sub-soil drainage and consequent ridging were distinctly opposed to a full and profitable use of the land, and before the abolition of the common-field system the drawbacks attending that uneconomical method (when the community was no longer self-supporting) formed a serious bar to good farming.

Another cause of the reduced employment of labour is the shrinkage of land under the plough. St. John Priest gives an analysis of the "Extent of the County" according to parishes which was compiled for the Board of Agriculture (presumably about 1800) by R. Parkinson, who founded his figures "upon enquiry and upon conjecture." This may explain why he makes the entire area no more than 375,464 acres, while the 1918 agricultural returns make it 479,360 acres. But even if Parkinson's figures were not strictly accurate they give us a fair guide, and show that 40 per cent. of the area was arable and 45 per cent. under permanent grass. By 1918 the proportion of arable had sunk to 31 per cent., and the permanent grass had risen to 51 per cent., and that in a county always famous for its old pastures.

[26] "General View of Agriculture of Bucks," p. 185.

The farm labourer, as we saw on page 65, is apt to rate a man as a good or bad farmer in direct proportion to the number of men employed on the farm. This view, while it ignores machinery, is not without justification; the hand-hoeing was thorough and effective, mowing with a scythe bruised the grass-stems less than the horse-drawn machine, and so on.

At present the very existence of arable land is threatened upon purely economic grounds; for, without wishing for a return to the former low rate of wages, the farmer is not in the position of the manufacturer, who is indifferent to high wages so long as he can increase his output. But the farmer's output is at the mercy of circumstances beyond his, or any human control, namely, the accident of the seasons which may mar his crop in its germination, its growth, or its ingathering.

A Rural Philosopher

Knowledge dwells
In heads replete with thoughts of other men;
Wisdom in minds attentive to their own.
Cowper: "*Task*," *Book VI.*

Several times the authority of Mr. Burrows, of Edlesborough, has been quoted for the customs of sixty or seventy years ago. By bringing together a few of his maxims it is hoped to give a slight idea of a man who was born while George IV. was still reigning, and kept an unclouded mind in the days of George V. His appearance was truly venerable; there was perfect patience and quietude in the rounded lines of his face, and as he lay in bed his faded eyes looked out upon the Green, where the cows were brought to be milked and left to lie at night, in those far-off days of the Common Fields. His mind was filled with that mellow wisdom which Mother Earth bestows on those of her children who have tugged a

hard living from her breast. An observant mind, placed in close contact with Nature through many changing seasons, cannot fail to acquire knowledge which lies deeper than the shallow book-learning of to-day. Thus he was driven to reason for himself, and said:

"There be as many ways o' farming as there be farmers. I've watched men try something new; I've followed 'em one season, and seen it dropped; and I says, If the new ways won't do, try the old uns again."

He had outgrown all illusions. Men and events took their just place in the scheme of things. Thus he said:

"Some men try to make a great show i' the world, and over-reach themselves. Far better take on a little land and do it well. But a little land marn't be heavy, or your teäms 'll eat all as you grow."

In some of us of fewer years there may yet linger a little of those fires of pride, ambition, and passion which are apt to scorch us. In Burrows they had sunk to a quiet, lambent flame that, as Carlyle says, "sees through the shows of things, into *things*." For example, he was unsparing in his quiet denunciation of bad farming:

"There's things done here and there as we know, but daresn't speak of, but land dare, and land *will* speak t' ye as 't is done by, you don't need telling about un."

Again:

"If land's let alone it 'll grow its own crop—trumpery. When you sow it, see that your crop has nought to hinder it."

On this subject of weeds he was also half humorous:

"Whenever I'm able to go into the garden I looks out for something partic'lar that I wants to see, and I'm sure to see something as I *don't* want to see."

His advice could be very practical, too:

"Sow your corn a fortnight afore or a fortnight after Old Michaelmas Day, according as your land's early or late."

Still better is the following:—

"You can't have good corn on short straw. A man told me he'd sowed some bad barley; that was waste, for he'd only get a poor, short straw with one kernel each side o' th' ear and one a-top. Good barley 'll have straw two foot six high and fourteen kernels a side in th' ear. Th' old tasker'll say: Give me they twenty-eights."

Burrows must always have had in a high degree that common sense which, alas! is all too uncommon. Experience grafted upon Intelligence had given him a happy turn of phrase; had the Son of Sirach been an English agricultural labourer,—thus had he spoken:

"If you want to farm well, here's the rule: Plenty of cold steel, and a man ahind it."

When he saw this was being written down, Burrows added:

"Aye, it's worth noting, and its worth following."

There cannot be many left who have so strong a memory as had Burrows of the taking of tithe in kind; he spoke of it at Christmas, 1921 (the last time the present writer saw him), and described the way in which one sheaf was placed across the top of every tenth shock, "and then you marn't touch un." When one looks at the great sweep of arable land around Edlesborough and thinks of the tenth shock, the great dimensions of the barn we saw there (in Chapter V.) can easily be understood.

The passing of the Tithe Commutation Act in 1836 did away with all tithing in kind.

In a well-ordered State two secretaries should have been appointed to take down the wise saws and pithy instances which Burrows uttered. The present writer's bad hearing and worse memory have gleaned but a scanty harvest; but even these few examples may serve to illustrate a character which was formed, to quote Matthew Arnold's words,

> Before this strange disease of modern life,
> With its sick hurry, its divided aims,
> Its heads o'er-tax'd, its palsied hearts, was rife.

And the mention of "its divided aims" reminds one of yet another saying of Burrows:

"A man as can't do more'n one thing bain't good for anything."

CHAPTER VII

DOVE-COTS

Upon the dove-cote's mossy slates
The pigeons coo around their mates.
J. CLARE: "*Shepherd's Calendar: September.*"

Pigeon-lofts contrived in the gable-end of buildings, or the barrel or square box set on a pole, are the feeble modern representatives of an extremely important erection, called columbarium, culver-house, dove-cot, or pigeon-house. It could be built only by "the lord of the manor, the rector, the heads of monastic houses, and freeholders."[1] So substantial were these dove-cots that we still retain a few, though disuse and neglect have played such havoc with them that they must form a diminishing quantity, and a few more generations may not be able to see so much as is left for us. Their use was to furnish food,[2] and we shall see that they were planned on so liberal a scale as to make pigeon-pie a possibly frequent dish in the largest household. Many instances are given of provision being expressly made in church towers to accommodate pigeons, which were the rector's property,[3] but no case of this kind has been noticed in our county,[4] and while we shall find some attached to monastic houses,

[1] W. Johnson: "Byways in British Archæology," 1912, p. 188.

[2] In addition "their dung was prized as the most valuable of all manures." (Lord Ernle's "English Farming," 1917, page 18.)

[3] T. F. Thiselton Dyer: "Church-lore Gleanings," 1891, Chapter VI.

[4] There used to be such a case; when the parvise over the thirteenth century South porch of High Wycombe Church was re-opened in 1827 it was found to be "constructed internally as a dove-cot;" the external openings had been closed, but feathers remained in the nesting-places. (Article in the "Records of Bucks," Vol. VII., p. 282, by the late Mr. R. S. Downs.)

the rest were appendages to manor-houses. The old writers agree in insisting upon two points in the construction of a pigeon-house—its nearness to water and the need for keeping out rats. On the first point we are told that "pigeons can go far for water themselves, but their returns must be very frequent and quick for their young ones, who are wanting much water, and by carrying it far it will be dried up in their crops before they can bring it to their young." [5]

Protection against rats is referred to several times in the "Complete Farmer" (1793), where it is recommended that the outside of the dove-cot be covered with tin to the height of 18 inches and projecting 3 or 4 inches, and that the lowest holes inside be "not less than 4 feet from the ground, that the wall being smooth, rats may not be able to reach them; and the upper row should be covered with a board projecting a considerable distance from the wall, for fear the rats should find means to climb the outside of the house." The water conditions have been kept pretty well in our examples, but the precautions taken against rats are by no means so evident. The "Complete Farmer" also lays it down that "there must be no window or other opening in the pigeon-house to the eastward; these should always face the south, for pigeons are very fond of the sun, especially in winter."

Most of our dove-cots lying in the north of the county, it will be convenient to begin at that end and come downwards, the best and largest, and the only one which still contains pigeons, lying in the extreme south-western corner. The first, then, is at Clifton Reynes, near Olney; it is a circular building of rubble, said by the Historical Monuments Commissioners to be of the seventeenth century, but appear-

[5] E. Lisle: "Observations in Husbandry," 1757, page 420.

ing to be earlier. The walls are 3 feet 4 inches thick at the base, and diminish somewhat towards the top. The whole building tapers slightly, and must have appeared very attractive when sound, but unfortunately the thatched roof collapsed in 1919, and the building must soon become ruinous. The internal diameter is 13½ feet, but the holes, made of rough, undressed stone, are set about 2½ feet apart, and there are only 270 altogether. There was no window, and the "lantern" through which the birds went in and out was in the centre of the roof. A foot or so below the eaves was an external ledge, or "offset," probably to keep away rats.

There was formerly another dove-cot at Clifton Reynes, about twenty feet square, "standing in Dove-house Close, behind the Wake Manor House." It had been allowed to fall into decay, and had collapsed in 1890.[6] At that time the circular dove-cot was in bad repair, though tenanted by pigeons.

At Tathall End (pronounced "Tottle"), Hanslope, is a dove-cot which was built in 1602, according to a tablet over the door, with the initials T. B. It is built of rubble and stone, and the ground floor is used as a loose box or stable. At the height of 8½ feet is a floor, access being gained through a trap door. The stone recesses are arranged, therefore, in the two gable ends of the building, and in the front and back walls up to the level of the eaves. The floor-space is 21½ feet from back to front, and nearly 18 feet from side to side; room is found for about 350 holes. There appears to have been a window in the S.W. wall, but it has been built up, possibly when making a coach-house which abuts upon the dove-cot wall. The "lantern" was probably in the middle of the roof, to

[6] "Records of Bucks," Vol. VI., p. 389, in an admirable paper by Mr. J. L. Myers.

judge by the timbers inside, but it has long gone, and the tiled roof gives no sign of its position; the interior, therefore, is in total darkness when it is broad daylight outside.

At Ravenstone is a large dove-cot built of rubble with a high-pitched roof (tiled); it is 19½ feet by 10 feet 2 inches inside, and the walls are 2 feet 8 inches thick, but it is lined with brick inside the rubble. There are over 900 resting-places, and the doorway and two windows are rather unusually large. The lantern is defective, but otherwise the structure is sound. The bricks are small, and the general appearance is that of seventeenth-century work, but it is unrecorded by the Historical Monuments Commissioners, who possibly attributed it to a later date. It is so conspicuous at the north-west end of the village that they cannot have overlooked it. An excellent spring of water is quite close to the building.

At Great Linford Rectory is a stone dove-cot, said by the Historical Monuments Commissioners to belong to the middle of the seventeenth century, but appearing to be earlier. It is twelve feet square, with walls 2 feet 4 inches thick, and has about 350 nesting-places, which turn to the left and to the right in alternate rows. There is a window in the south wall, and a central "lantern" in the roof.

About three-quarters of a mile north of Astwood stands the dovecot which formerly belonged to Astwoodbury House; it is now converted into a cottage, with an upper floor inserted. The building is of red and black bricks of late seventeenth or early eighteenth century, and is octagonal. It is stated to have "contained upwards of three hundred nesting

places,"[7] which, if true, was very poor accommodation in so large a building. We are also told that "a large beam in the centre was equipped with spiral steps, by which access was gained to the nests." This arrangement is unlike that of any other dove-cot in the county, and is unintelligible to the present writer. At all events the conversion of this building to a cottage deprives it of any interest to us in our present enquiry.

An extremely fine dovecot is to be found within a few miles of Astwood, attached to Chicheley Hall, and apparently is of the same date (1708—1715). This is also an octagonal building externally, each side measuring 8 feet 9 inches; inside it is circular and 17 feet in diameter. There is a circular, domed roof of tiles surmounted by the "lantern" through which the birds pass, but there is no window. There are about 750 nest-holes round the walls, set alternately with an alighting ledge before them, and a circular brick erection in the middle contains 50 more holes. On this central pillar rests a large square beam, the upper end meeting some cross timbers at the level of the eaves. This beam turns easily on a pivot; attached to it is a frame-work bearing a ladder, slightly inclined; by this means any nest can easily be reached. This is the only *perfect* example of a "potence"[8] in complete working order in the county, known to the writer; some imperfect ones will be mentioned later.

[7] O. Ratcliff: "History and Antiquities of the Newport Hundreds," 1900, p. 182. This dovecot was originally converted into two cottages, and two staircases are squeezed in somehow; there are four rooms, and the present tenant considers this more accommodation than she requires, so that there is a room to let—in a dovecot! William Howitt, in "The Rural Life of England," tells us of a physician who lived in a dovecot, but he was eccentric by nature, and a drunkard by habit. The idea of having lodgings in a building which was built for 300 pairs of pigeons is most engaging.

[8] This word, which is the French for "gallows," the writer owes to the delightful "Book of Dovecots," by Mr. A. O. Cooke, which has been published since this chapter was first written.

At Haversham, a few miles to the south-east of Tathall End, are two square, stone-built dove-cots, one at the Grange and the other at the Manor House. The Grange dove-cot is of ruder construction, possibly not much later than the Clifton Reynes building. Internally it measures about 11 feet by 12 feet, and there are about 450 stone recesses. The lantern remains in the middle of the roof, and there are windows (possibly not all original) in the north, south, and east walls.[9] At the Manor House the date 1665, with the initials M. T., appears on a stone set in the north wall. Inside it is 14 feet 8 inches square, and the stone walls are 2½ feet thick. There are about 330 holes, and the lantern remains, though the pyramidal roof is defective.

An interesting timber-built dove-cot is at Newton Longville Manor House, on the site of an alien Cluniac priory. The timbers are set closely together, and filled with a brick nogging, but the nesting-boxes are of oak with rounded entrances, which are no more than 4½ inches high and wide; in nearly all our other instances the openings are not less than 6 inches square, or thereabouts. There are 360 pigeon-holes, and the internal measurement of the building is just about 14 feet 8 inches square, as at Haversham Manor. The pyramidal and tiled roof was very defective, and the whole building in a very bad state three years ago; when seen in May, 1923, it had become almost ruinous, and one fears will soon become so entirely. To complete its destruction ivy has been allowed to encroach, with the usual disastrous effect. This is the more to

[9] This dove-cot is ignored by the Historical Monuments Commissioners. If they consider it of later date than 1700, the writer respectfully demurs.

be regretted as it is the only dovecot of the kind in the county.

At Stewkley (Manor Farm) is a very interesting dove-cot; it is octagonal, and built of red brick (in 1704, as given on a panel above the door), with a diamond pattern in black "headers" on the sides; it is therefore of the same type as the Chicheley dove-cot, but, not being so high, its proportions appear better. A well-moulded cornice runs round the building, and, when less overgrown with trees than it is at present, it must have been very attractive. Within, the building measures 19 feet 4 inches between each pair of sides, and as the holes are carried right down to the ground there are very nearly 1,000 in all. They are placed immediately above one another, which is not a good arrangement, but a pleasing effect is given to them by using two round-nosed bricks (with the rounded ends joining upside down) for the top of each cote; this gives them a kind of ogee finish which is decorative. There is an original window on the south side, and the lantern was in the middle of the pyramidal roof. Although in fairly good order, the building has been used for other purposes, and a small erection of some kind has been made inside the dove-cot, with a separate modern doorway in the west wall; the original door is on the east face of the building.

Coming south, we find a square brick-built dove-cot of the late seventeenth century at Church Farm, Edlesborough; it stands inside the fine moat, and complies fully with the rule that a plentiful water-supply should be close at hand. There are about 300 brick cotes, and the timber-framing of the lantern remains, though it no longer opens in the roof, which is tiled. For the next dove-cot we must go from Edlesborough to Ellesborough, where a square building stands, also within a moat at Grove Farm. The walls are faced with flint, with brick quoins. For some reason the "Victoria

County History" says that it is "possibly of the sixteenth century," but there is no evidence of any such age, though some old material may have been used again. There are about 600 brick cotes, and the potence remains in a somewhat dilapidated state; it does not suit a square building so well as a round one, because the corners remain difficult of access. This dove-cot is in fairly good order, and it is hoped to re-stock it someday. It was certainly re-built, in whole or in part, some 70 or 80 years ago, when the owner of the day was fond of trap-shooting.

In the adjoining parish of Stoke Mandeville are the remains of a dove-cot, standing near to Manor Farm, and not far from the new church. The building is of irregular shape, and seems to have been the end of a range of outbuildings, of which this alone remains. It is of brick with a moulded cornice, and appears to date from the middle of the eighteenth century. The ground floor is used for cattle or horses, as at Tathall End, and the pigeons were housed in the upper part of the building, which has a loft-floor. The pigeon-holes have gone, except seven, and they are somewhat rudely made by inserting boards between the bricks; the board serving for the floor of one cote and the ceiling of that beneath, and at the same time serving for alighting-board by projecting an inch or two in front of the brick-work. Possibly holes of this kind formerly lined the walls, which seem to have been disturbed at some time. The building is 19 feet across inside, and the dove-cot part was lighted or ventilated by two openings in the south wall, protected by close wooden lattice-work. In the middle of the tiled roof is an extremely elegant lantern, octagonal in shape and covered by a kind of dome.

Our next example lies among the hills, between Amersham and Little Missenden. It was built by Mr. T. D. T. Drake somewhere about 1800, and is particu-

larly interesting because it is fully described in 1810.[10] Being a plastered cylinder of brick, instead of being tapered, as is the Clifton Reynes cot, it is not an object of beauty. The internal diameter is $20\frac{1}{4}$ feet, and there are just about 1,000 recesses for the birds, each of them being 16 inches wide inside and 9 inches from front to back. It was probably for the sake of "sport" that this large dove-cot was built at Shardeloes; it has not been used for pigeons for some years, and at the time of writing it was being turned into a granary. No provision seems to have been made for a window or ventilation.

Not far from Whiteleaf Cross, at Monks Risborough, is a distinctive kind of dove-cot, said by the Historical Monuments Commissioners to be of the sixteenth century. It is built of very coarsely-squared "clunch," or the lower chalk, more usually called "rag" locally. The walls are about 2 feet 8 inches thick, and the inside measurement of the building is about $15\frac{3}{4}$ feet each way. There were only 216 cotes, as they are not brought within some feet of the ground, which is just as well, because pigeons never choose the lower holes for nesting. The building might be even earlier than the date given, for it seems of primitive construction; the cots are exactly under one another, instead of being arranged in rows alternately; they go straight back, and are no wider within than at the mouth; finally, there is no ledge upon which to alight between the rows of cotes. A lantern is set in the middle of a pyramidal, tiled roof, in the south side of which is a window, probably not original. Most unfortunately the east wall of the building collapsed entirely, it is

[10] Rev. St. John Priest: "General View of the Agricudture of Buckinghamshire," 1810, pages 38-40. Priest takes Mr. Drake to task for making the cotes (or "lockers" as he calls them), single instead of double, for "before a pigeon parts with her first brood, she begins to lay eggs for a second." He also thinks that there should be an upright projection on each side of each hole to prevent the birds from interfering with each other. Neither of these suggestions is adopted in any dovecot mentioned in these notes.

said through frost. Until that serious disaster it was in good working order, and is distinguished by a curiously carved doorway of clunch, on the north side, of sixteenth century workmanship, but possibly moved there from elsewhere.

At Dinton Hall is a circular dove-cot built of stone rubble with walls 3 feet thick. The internal diameter is 18 feet 4 inches; there is a south window, and a lantern at the top of the tiled roof. There are 300 cotes, square-mouthed, and with a tile in each for an alighting ledge. The potence is in fair working order, and the dove-cot was in active use until nine years ago.[11]

Our last dove-cot lies in the extreme south-west of the county, and it is our best, for it is the only one which is constantly tenanted by the right creatures. One had been converted into a cottage, in some were fowls, in one an old turkey, and one seemed to house a pony. This true pigeon-house is at Notley Abbey, founded in the twelfth century as a house of the Austin Canons, and later a very well endowed abbey. The present dove-cot may not be older than the fifteenth century, when the guest-house (which forms the chief part of the present residence) was built. It is made of dressed stone with walls nearly 3 feet thick, and is no less than 31½ feet square inside, the walls rising 17½ feet to the level of the eaves. From the middle of each wall another wall projects at right angles for 8½ feet, and as the sides and ends of these short walls are pierced with holes a considerable addition is made to the accommodation of the dove-cot. The total number of recesses seems to be 1,450, in addition to which the tops of the walls are provided with a kind of trough, in which the birds also nest; but the figure of "four to five thousand" given by the Monuments

[11] This dove-cot is not mentioned by the Historical Monuments Commissioners; it has every appearance of belonging to the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century.

Photo by *Walshams.*

DOVECOT—NOTLEY ABBEY—(?) FIFTEENTH CENTURY.

Commissioners seems to be three times too much.[12] There are dormer windows, protected by wooden slats, on the south-east and south-west sides of the hipped roof; and the birds go in and out through two openings set in dormers high on the south-eastern slope of the roof. The roof timbers inside have wire netting across them, and the entrances to this space and the external openings can be closed by a cord worked from the ground. As the birds rise to the top when the door is opened, they can thus be trapped above the netting, and as many as are wanted can be secured.

By the courtesy of Mr. H. Reynolds, owner of Notley Abbey, it is possible to give an illustration which explains the arrangement of this dove-cot very clearly.

Besides these it is not uncommon to find "Dove-cot" occurring in field-names when the building itself has perished. For example, there is a small meadow at Hillesden, now owned by Mr. Cadd, and known to this day as "Dove-house Close," though no dove-cot has stood there within living memory. There is a neatly-made well in the middle of the field, which is on a slope, from which a pipe conducts the overflow into a long trough and, eventually, into two depressions in the lower end of the field. The field is very small, and Mr. Cadd is of opinion that the well was made on purpose to keep the pigeons in the dove-cot without having far to go in search of water, which would otherwise be some distance off.

Considering the care and labour expended in building these dove-cots there is something melancholy in finding all but one disused. Many have not held pigeons for years, while some only ceased to house them during the late war, when pigeon-owners had

[12] Mr. A. O. Cooke: "Book of Dovecotes," page 112, repeats this figure, but has accepted it from the Commissioners. Mr. Cooke speaks of the short, projecting walls with approbation, and says that it is the only instance of such construction known to him.

to undergo official attention. In one case the birds deserted, according to the owner, because the custom of strewing the floor of the dove-cot with rough salt was forgotten. Belief in the value of salt for this purpose was held in past times, and an unpleasant mess, into which the boiled head and feet of a goat entered, was recommended to be thrown down to prevent the birds from deserting their home. A pigeon is a voracious creature, and it is doubtful whether to-day it does not eat to a greater extent than its own worth as a foodstuff. The gregarious habits of the birds and the fecundity of a well-established colony justified the substantial buildings which were erected from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries.

CHAPTER VIII

TWO VALE INDUSTRIES

But times are alter'd; trade's unfeeling train
Usurp the land, and dispossess the swain.

GOLDSMITH: "*Deserted Village.*"

The great business of the Vale has always been the production of food. One hopes its mainstay may always continue to be this, the most important of all industries whatsoever. Within the memory of very many living to-day, however, the labourer was forced by the lowness of his wages to have recourse to various means of adding to his weekly income by the labour of his family. The north of the county was the stronghold of lacemaking, and it is there that the revival of that beautiful craft has most hold. That subject has been so often written about,[1] that it is not possible to add anything useful here. On the other hand, straw-plait and duck-rearing were very actively carried on in the Vale, the first-named until forty years ago, and the second until quite recently; and, though neither of them is extinct, they have ceased, for different reasons, to be industries of any wide importance. The present writer has failed to find any attempt to give a full account of either;[2] and he has brought together a few facts while it is still possible to obtain first-hand information.

[1] Particularly in "The Romance of the Lace Pillow," by Mr. T. Wright, of Olney, which was published in 1919.

[2] There is a good account of "Duck Raising" in R. Gibbs's "History of Aylesbury," 1885, p.p. 622-4. He quotes a long description by "Mr. Fowler, of Aylesbury;" it is not taken from any of J. K. Fowler's three published books.

Straw-Plait

The various processes of the straw-plait were as follows:—The straw dealer purchased from the farmer, making him an offer for an unthreshed wheat stack. This might be from £5 to £10 a ton; the farmer had to place the straw in the barn, and the dealer then drew out the longest straws and cut off the ears of corn, which he left for the farmer. He then gathered the straw together and combed it with a small iron-toothed rake to get rid of the haulm, and made up the straw into bundles of 56, 80, or even 112 lbs.

These bundles he might sell as they were or he might have them "stripped," which meant that they were cut just above the knot, and if this was skilfully done it also took off the "flag" or leaf of the wheat, leaving the straws 9 to 10 inches in length. This was often done by piece-work, the quantity being measured by filling a pottle measure with the cut straws. The next process was bleaching, for which purpose the straws were damped and placed in a box into which a cup of molten sulphur was introduced, and the box was then closed. Sometimes straws were dyed black or blue. After bleaching, or colouring, the straw had to be graded; a handful was taken and shaken loosely on end over a series of wire sieves of varying degrees of fineness, the smallest obviously coming out first. Each sieve had a hopper beneath it through which the straws fell into boxes, so that all the straws were in graduated size; they were then examined, and the specked or defective straws were removed, after which they were tied up into bundles four or five inches in diameter and sold to the cottager to plait. The coarsest kinds of plait were made of whole straws, but the finer plaits were made of split straws. Splitting was done with an ingenious little device consisting of a pear-shaped piece of wood four

inches high and two inches across at the widest part, where four or five holes are made, each $\frac{3}{8}$th inch in diameter. In these holes are steel cutters, radiating like the spokes of a wheel, and with a point projecting at the axle of the wheel. There might be from two to eight spokes; a fine straw would be drawn through the four-cutter hole, and a coarse straw through one with more cutters. The straw was placed on the point and forced against the cutters until it could be drawn through from the other side. Most of the cutters in the Vale cottages bear the name of L. Austin, of Tring. The strips were next passed through a mill, which is a wooden framework about twelve inches high, fastened to the wall. In the frame are two wooden rollers three inches wide and three inches in diameter. The bottom roller has a crank fastened to the axle, to enable it to be turned conveniently. The upper roller is not connected with the lower one, but revolves when the straw is wound through; a wooden screw at the top makes it possible to adjust the distance apart of the two rollers. The split straws are called "splints." When double straws are being used two splints are worked together with the inside or rough surfaces touching, and the smooth and bright surfaces outwards, giving the two-side advantage of the whole[3] straw, without its thickness. Doubles are known in the trade as "imitation."

There were various patterns of plait, of which the most simple, perhaps, was the "four-pearl," known to the trade as "rustic." A much more closely-woven pattern was called "whipcord" by the cottager, and "Dunstable plait" by the trade, made in seven "doubles," that is, 14 splints; it forms a very close and graceful plait. Another pattern was known as "brilliant." This, while generally made of single straws, might be made of doubles; it owes its name

[3] Whole straws are usually called "wool stra's."

to the sparkling effect of its uneven surface. It can be made of any width, 8, 12, 24, or more splints being used, and the innermost ones may be left smooth and unplaited, when it is called "satin brilliant." On one edge of "brilliant" some straws are turned over instead of being plaited in with the rest, forming a smooth edge which is called the "feather." While it is impossible to describe in words the pattern of a plait, the method employed in making it was to tie up the splints in a little bundle, which was tucked under the left arm, and they were then drawn out and placed across the mouth. This may not be hygienic, but the slight moisture so imparted made the straw easier to plait. The splints being only 9 or 10 inches long, new ones had continually to be "set in," and care was taken that this was done regularly, that is to say, the first straws were not all renewed together, or the plait would be unequal. The ends of the straws set in are called the "speel" (if that spelling is correct), and they have to be clipped off when the plait is completed. Plait was always made in "half-scores," "scores," or "double-scores," of yards being understood. Great care had to be taken to keep the hands extremely clean while plaiting, or the plait lost its brightness and suffered in value accordingly. The finished plait was measured up by holding one end and passing round the elbow between finger and thumb again; the scores or half-scores were then put together on end, and a bundle of 40 or 50 score was tied up. A score of "double pearl" took about six hours to make, and "three score" was a very good day's work, not easily kept up, but the rate at which a plait could be made naturally varied a great deal.[4] The advantage

[4] An exceedingly clever and industrious plaiter made 20 score in one week, and the quality being high it fetched 1s. a score, a very good price. To enable her to do this she used to sit up in bed at 4 o'clock on a summer morning and plait for an hour or two before rising. (Information supplied by Mr. F. Roberts, of Aston Clinton.)

of making it to a cottager's wife was that her children could also make it, and the combined output of the family would make a handsome addition to the weekly income. The price varied according to the kind of plait and the skill with which it was made, but apparently one person might earn from 6s. to 12s. by a week's work, and the wife and children often earned more than the husband, at a time when his wages were somewhere between 9s. and 12s. a week.

One of the most important markets for the sale of plait was held at Tring each Friday. From the villages all round the plaiters took their wares and lined the street in front of the church, where a small market-house and an adjoining shop used to stand on the space opposite to the present "Rose and Crown." The dealers then came round and bought the plait, or paid for it if it had been ordered before-hand. The market began officially at 9 o'clock, when a bell was rung; there was no open buying and selling before that hour. It lasted for about two hours, and during that time an old man, appointed by the plait-dealers, used to go about with a yard-stick and test one score or half-score in a bundle. If it proved short in length a similar shortage was assumed in all the other scores or half-scores of that bundle, and a deduction was made by the dealer at the time of payment.

There were also weekly markets at Edlesborough and Ivinghoe. At the last-named place between £300 and £400 used to be paid out weekly by the plait-dealers.

Kelly's Directory of 1869 names twelve straw dealers in Aston Clinton and Buckland alone, and there were straw-plait dealers as far apart as Ivinghoe Aston, Newton Longville, and Chesham. The same authority gives the number of persons employed in the manufacture of straw-plait as 3,133 in 1861, and that

number would probably be greater if all the child-labour were to be included.

In some villages were "plait-schools," which were not usually schools quite in the same sense as the lace-schools, but merely cottages where the children assembled on the payment of a penny a week each, and vied with each other in plaiting the most; it was the stimulus of competition which made the "schools" useful.

Among old Cobbett's various good qualities modesty never took a very active place, consequently as he rode on 23rd September, 1829, into "this town of Tring, which is a very pretty and respectable place," he was reminded of his "endeavours to introduce useful things into this country" by seeing a case of straw for plaiting outside the door of a shop. Unluckily this proved to be straw imported from Tuscany, which set the old Radical raging at the slowness of people in profiting by reading his "Cottage Economy," where they might find the whole mystery of straw-plait fully set forth "as plain as words can make it." The present compiler can only say that after procuring this book with a great deal of trouble it is of no use whatever, being chiefly concerned with the substitution of certain grasses for straw, though he confesses that the plait will be somewhat brittle when made. The trouble evidently lay in the coarseness of the straw, and he seems to have had no knowledge of the splitter, which is said to have come into general use in 1815.[5] The large number of people in the Vale who made a living from straw-plait, or considerably supplemented their income by means of it, did not work according to Cobbett's methods at all; it was a highly-specialised industry, in which straw dealers first figured, selling the raw material to the cottagers, who plaited it and sold it

[5] "Victoria County History," p. 113.

to the plait-dealers, who, in turn, sold to the hat-makers. Although the simpler and coarser plaits were very easy to make, the finer and more complicated ones needed skill which was only gained by teaching children at the age of five or six.

Throughout this article the past tense has been used; the competition of Italian plait had long been felt, but about 1880 a far more formidable competition appeared in the shape of Asiatic labour. China, and recently Japan, sadly undercut the home market, which is all the more a pity, as America never could make plait, and English plait always commanded a sale in America.[6] Though a little brilliant is still made round about Wilstone, Marsworth, Cheddington, and so on, and a little whipcord at Edlesborough,[7] it is indeed but a little, and much labour is needed to earn very few shillings. The plaiters are elderly or old, for unless taught as children the wonderful facility which gives rapid and accurate work cannot be acquired, and the modern Education Acts do not exactly encourage anything which interrupts their curriculum.

Duck Breeding

Home industries, such as lace-making or straw-plaiting, yielded a small but certain income in return for assiduous labour. If the profits were modest there was an assured market for good work—there were at least no losses to be feared. The rearing of ducks, on the contrary, was highly speculative, sometimes providing large profits, but equally liable to wipe them out in the following year with heavy losses. The white, or "Aylesbury," duck had the advantage of being a large bird, maturing quickly, and the chief

[6] Information kindly supplied by Mr. Walter Gray, of Edlesborough.

[7] It appears as though a particular parish used to be famed for one type of plait; thus Weston Turville made pearl, and Aston Clinton made whipcord; whilst around Chesham a kind known as "piping" was made.

aim of the duck breeder was to secure the early markets, about Easter, when good prices prevailed. To keep 1,000 it was necessary to have 30 to 40 stock ducks; as soon as these began to lay the country round was scoured for broody hens. The breeder's troubles then began. The nests had to be examined to make sure that there were no broken eggs, and as soon as the ducklings were hatched they proved an endless anxiety, being easily susceptible to cramp and all sorts of mysterious ailments which made them die in scores, whatever pains were taken for their preservation. They were fed on egg and bread, chopped up; bullock's liver; rice, which had to be boiled in a bag and taken out of the water when the grains had swollen, but before they burst; boiled graves (made of meat and offal which was compressed into cakes); and, above all, barley meal. It was necessary for them to have grit in the form, for example, of a fine gravel dug at Gubblecote, which was placed at the bottom of platters of water. But beside the various anxieties attendant upon their feeding, young ducks were very delicate; if exposed to frost they were said to become soft-billed; if allowed upon a pond in cold weather they developed cramp; if a thunderstorm came on while they were in their pens, and before they could be placed under shelter, they would crowd together and smother each other. Ducks fattened better if they were not allowed free access to running water; a shallow pond or a ditch, where the water could become warmed by the sun, might be safe, but to allow young ducks to swim on a running stream after they had been shut up together all night and become very warm was to invite disaster. A pond or stream must be available for the stock ducks, or the eggs would not be fertile. Aylesbury ducks are said to be quite hardy, but the artificial conditions necessary to fatten them quickly made them delicate, or, at least, liable to

develop disease. The very large numbers which were kept upon a comparatively small area of ground resulted in its becoming infected, so that even if an entirely new stock were introduced it might develop the same malady which had afflicted the previous stock. The symptom of one of these ailments was a speck upon the eye, which presently spread and covered the eyeball; the duck would not eat, and presently died.

According to the progress which they made, ducks might be ready for market when from 8 to 12 weeks old; they were then sent to market plucked, except for their wings, and with their legs turned back. Carriers used to call for the birds once or twice a week, collecting one day and travelling through the night to London, where at Easter time the birds might fetch from 6s. to 10s. apiece, or even more. The L. and N.-W. Railway also used to send a van to collect ducks on three days a week.

The duck-rearing industry has declined because the ground became foul through the large numbers of birds kept upon it, and many a man was brought to the verge of ruin by the sudden loss of the greater part of his stock. Besides this, the present prices of food and conditions are by no means so favourable for the breeder; in these days barley meal used to cost about 10s. a sack, and brown rice has been bought in the past at 18s. for 240 lbs., or for less than 1d. a lb. There are no longer the facilities for collection, and the breeder has to furnish his own "flats" or hampers for holding the birds. Duck-rearing seems always to have been very much of a lottery; to-day the "blanks" are so many as to make it a very risky business indeed.

CHAPTER IX

DUCK DECOYS

Our countrymen, in pools prepared by a new artifice and fitted with their channels and nets, and stored with coy-ducks, take yearly in the winter-time duck and mallard, wigeon, teal, and other birds of the duck-kind in great numbers.

WILLUGHBY'S "*Ornithology*" (Ed. J. Ray, 1678, p. 373).

[The following chapter is mainly from the pen of Mr. N. J. Shirley Leggatt, whose acquaintance with all that has been printed on the subject, and power of close observation, render him particularly fitted to make a record which should prove of considerable value.]

An art which is gradually dying out, though well understood and successfully practised a century ago, is that of duck-decoying.

Introduced into this country from Holland, the decoy's efficacy for supplying the larder and as a commercial enterprise was soon apparent, and advantage was taken in the Fen districts and round the coast of the huge flocks of wild-fowl that were so conspicuous a feature of the marsh lands and wastes.

The more inland counties were less adapted for this pursuit, nevertheless we find many decoys were installed at considerable distances from the coast owing to the fact that wild-fowl will often travel many miles in search of solitude and freedom from disturbance during their resting hours, which are those of daylight.

Amongst these inland decoys is to be numbered that at Boarstall, the only one remaining to us in working order at the present time in the county.

Before describing it and discussing its history and origin, it may be well to give a brief outline of the evolution of decoys in general, their method of construction, and the principles of their management.

It is difficult to trace the precise origin of decoys or the date of their invention. They seem to have been a device first in use in the Low Countries. A picture by Hans Bol, who flourished in the sixteenth century (1534—1593), was published as an engraving in 1582, and quite clearly shows the decoy-pond and the entrance to one of the channels in which the wild-fowl are taken, with the netting and screens also in evidence, and the decoy-ducks leading the wild birds into the net. An earlier method of taking large numbers of water-fowl was by driving them during the moulting season, when the birds were unable to fly, into a tunnel net covering a channel leading from a large sheet of water.

This manner of taking duck later gave way to the decoy, the essential differences between the two methods being that in the older plan the duck were taken out of season, by driving, and with the later contrivance they were lured into nets when in prime condition and with the full use of their wings.

The first "Koye," as it was then called, in this country seems to have been made by Sir W. Wodehouse, who lived in the reign of James I. Our authority for this is Sir Henry Spelman, who died in 1641, so that this method has been known and practised in England for nearly three hundred years.

The purpose of a decoy is to catch duck alive, their death being afterwards encompassed by the decoy man at his leisure.

For this purpose a pond in a situation as free as possible from disturbing factors and attractive to wild-fowl is the first consideration. Radiating from this pond and gently curving so that their ends are invisible from any part of the pond are shallow channels covered over with netting stretched upon half-hoops with their ends firmly embedded each on

opposite sides of the channels. These pipes, as they are called, vary in number from one to six or more; they narrow from about twelve feet or so at their mouths to a few inches at their extremities. The top of the hoop which spans the mouth of the pipe is in general some thirteen feet from the surface of the water, each hoop being lower than the one preceding it until, at the end of the pipe, the hoop is only about twelve inches from the water at its highest point. The last portion of the net is detachable, and here the duck are "reduced into possession," as the lawyers would put it. It must be explained that the birds are enticed up the pipe from the pond, they are not driven; and this is accomplished by making use of two characteristics common to many wild creatures, namely, curiosity and the ready acceptance of a free meal. Wild fowl, too, are a curious mixture of timidity and confidence; anything unusual will at first alarm them, or at any rate put them upon their guard, but when their first suspicions are allayed curiosity asserts itself, and investigation, at a safe distance, follows.

The decoy-man turns this rather human quality to a good account. A series of reed or straw screens about 6 or 7 feet high and about 10 feet or more long are permanently fixed along one bank of each pipe, *i.e.*, the bank which presents its convex curve to the screens. These are nearly parallel to the bank, but each points slightly towards the end of the pipe, the result being that the end of each screen misses by about 18 inches the beginning of the next, the gap being filled (except between the first and last pairs of screens) by a low fence of board or other convenient material about a foot and a-half high. The arrangement of the screens may best be described by the expression "en échelon," the appearance on plan being that of a zig-zag.

The pond itself, with its pipes, is surrounded by a belt of tall trees and undergrowth through which the necessary paths leading to the screens are made; these paths are further hidden from observation, in the case of the Boarstall decoy, by a high bank.

On the pond are kept the decoy-ducks. These are in many cases half-bred mallard, which are regularly fed upon the water. Their numbers vary according to the size of the decoy pond, fifty or more being retained upon some of the larger ponds.

Some of these birds are pinioned to keep them from straying, while others have the full use of their wings in order that they may travel to other sheets of water and establish a lead to the decoy for the wild-fowl frequenting the neighbourhood. Being thoroughly accustomed to the decoy and its pipes, and coming readily to the low whistle of the decoy-man at feeding time, they do not hesitate to enter the mouths of the pipes in search of any grain that their keeper may cast over the screens into the water. The wild ducks, with a false sense of security, will follow and offer themselves a comparatively easy prey to the fowler.

But the wild birds are sometimes shy. It is then that the decoy-dog, or piper, comes into play.

The sudden appearance of its natural enemy, the fox, will set every duck, aware of its presence, on the alert. A dog is chosen which resembles as nearly as possible, both in colour and size, a fox, and he is trained to work to the signals made by the decoy man. Silence, they say, is golden, and nowhere, perhaps, is it more valuable than in the working of a decoy. The piper must never bark when at work. His "narrow path of duty" is that running along the bank of the pipe between the water's edge and the screens. At a signal from the decoy-man he leaps the low fences joining the screens and thus shows himself to the duck on the water. This, after one

or two repetitions, has the desired effect of luring the duck up the pipe, their anxiety to investigate the unusual sight overcoming their timidity.

When the fowl are sufficiently advanced under the netting the decoy-man, who has been watching them through a small peep-hole made in each of the screens, rapidly but silently retraces his footsteps to the space between the first and second screens, and shows himself.

At once the wild birds take alarm, and rising rapidly from the water dash upwards and forwards to escape their enemy, quickly reaching the closed end of the pipe. The decoy-man follows behind the screens and soon unfastens the detachable end of the net in which the fowl are enmeshed. This is opened and the birds taken out one by one. The half-tame decoy-ducks which have entered the pipe do not follow, but return to the pond, as the appearance of the decoy man who feeds them is familiar to them.

So much for the generalities of a pursuit which is gradually becoming, like falconry, a forgotten art.

It remains for us to describe more particularly the subject of our chapter.

The Boarstall decoy is on the estate of Major H. L. Aubrey-Fletcher, by whose courtesy it was possible to inspect it and witness the skill of his decoy-man, Daniel White, a hale old man over 80 years of age, of commanding height and wonderfully preserved powers, and with a lifetime's knowledge of field sports and much of the wisdom begotten of close contact with nature.

One sunny morning in mid-February we visited Boarstall and found White, who first took charge of the decoy nearly sixty years ago (to be accurate, in 1865), awaiting us at the door of his cottage with Paddy, his little Irish terrier, who welcomed us with a due sense of her own importance as the only piper

Photo by *Chapman, Buckingham.*

BOARSTALL DECOY—MOUTH OF ~~WEST~~ NORTH PIPE.

[Keeper White is standing by the second screen to show its height.]

in Buckinghamshire. Although a well-bred animal, Paddy came from the Dogs' Home; she is now about seven years old, and has a wonderfully tender mouth.

A south-west wind was blowing, and, cautioning us to be silent and on no account to smoke, the decoy-man led us through the outskirts of the spinney surrounding the pond to the southernmost pipe, Paddy trotting along at his heels on the end of a string. Here we halted while White, after a scrutiny of the pond through a small aperture in the screen nearest the pipe's mouth, signalled to us to take a glance through the same hole. A few duck were to be seen on the water within our view, three or four close to the entrance to the pipe, and a small bunch of teal at the far side of the pond. Not many fowl were upon the water, the weather being mild, although we were afterwards told that about a month or so previously, with a cold north wind blowing, a thousand duck or more had covered the surface of the pond.

At a signal from White, who was behind the first screen, we retreated further up the pipe, keeping ourselves hidden from the water by the screens, while he, releasing Paddy from her lead, threw a morsel of bread in front of the first screen.

Paddy took the cue, and, showing herself to the duck at the mouth of the pipe, picked up the bread, and, continuing her course, returned to her master behind the screen in front of which she had just appeared, thus vanishing again from the view of the fowl.

The decoy-man was now watching the birds through the opening in the third screen, and seeing them evidently interested in Paddy's eccentricities he threw a piece of bread this time in the opposite direction, the pursuit of which took the dog back again to her original position behind the first screen.

Another signal and the piper showed herself again in front of the second screen and re-joined her master behind the third. After a cautious glance through the aperture it was clear that the duck were entering the pipe to investigate. Once more a crumb of bread was thrown, now over the next fence, and the piper was waved on to her intermittent luncheon. Again the fowl advanced, a mallard and a duck. Would they come far enough up the pipe to be taken? Back behind the screens returns Paddy, her master advancing towards the end of the pipe and watching through the screen as before.

Interest becomes keener as Paddy shows herself again over the next fence still in pursuit of her fragmentary meal, and reaching the end of the screen joins us again in rear of it. Closer swim the two duck, and once more a fence is negotiated by the indefatigable little bread hunter.

Quickly White returns to the mouth of the pipe behind the screens, pulling his handkerchief from his pocket as he goes. Another yard or two and he is behind the first screen, and as he shows himself in the gap between this and the next and waves his handkerchief the duck rise from the water. With no thought of returning the way they came, their efforts are bent on putting as much distance as they can between themselves and the decoy-man. In confusion, they strike the top of the netting that arches over the pipe and fly on, coming nearer to the water, and lower still as the arches contract, until finally they are stopped by the detachable tunnel-net. The decoy-man has by now returned to the end of the pipe, and the tunnel-net is rapidly disengaged from the rest of the netting and the duck taken out. As each is extracted its wings are deftly interlocked over its back so that it cannot struggle, and with a rapidity that is astonishing the vertebræ of the neck are dislocated and the

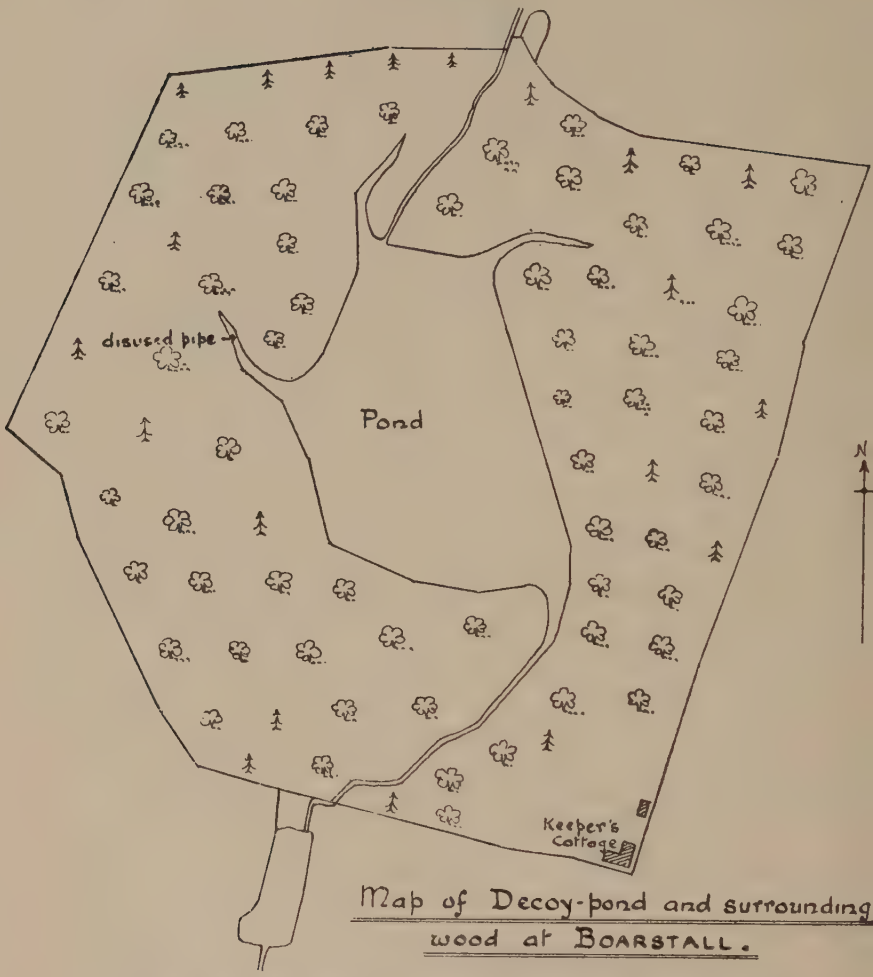
duck, thus instantaneously killed, is thrown on the grass.

Paddy, whose enthusiasm in the proceedings has rather evaporated, has meanwhile been patiently awaiting the conclusion of the morning's sport, and, quietly picking up one of the fowl in her mouth, staidly follows her master back to the cottage, where both the duck are laid on their backs on the wall surrounding the decoy-man's home, and their beautiful plumage, quite unruffled, duly appreciated. White points out, with the eye of a connoisseur, the feathers that are so much sought after by anglers for tying some of the most attractive lures to be found in the fisherman's fly book.

The decoy itself is situate within a few hundred yards of the Oxfordshire border, so that the reader will appreciate how barely it falls within the limits of these pages.

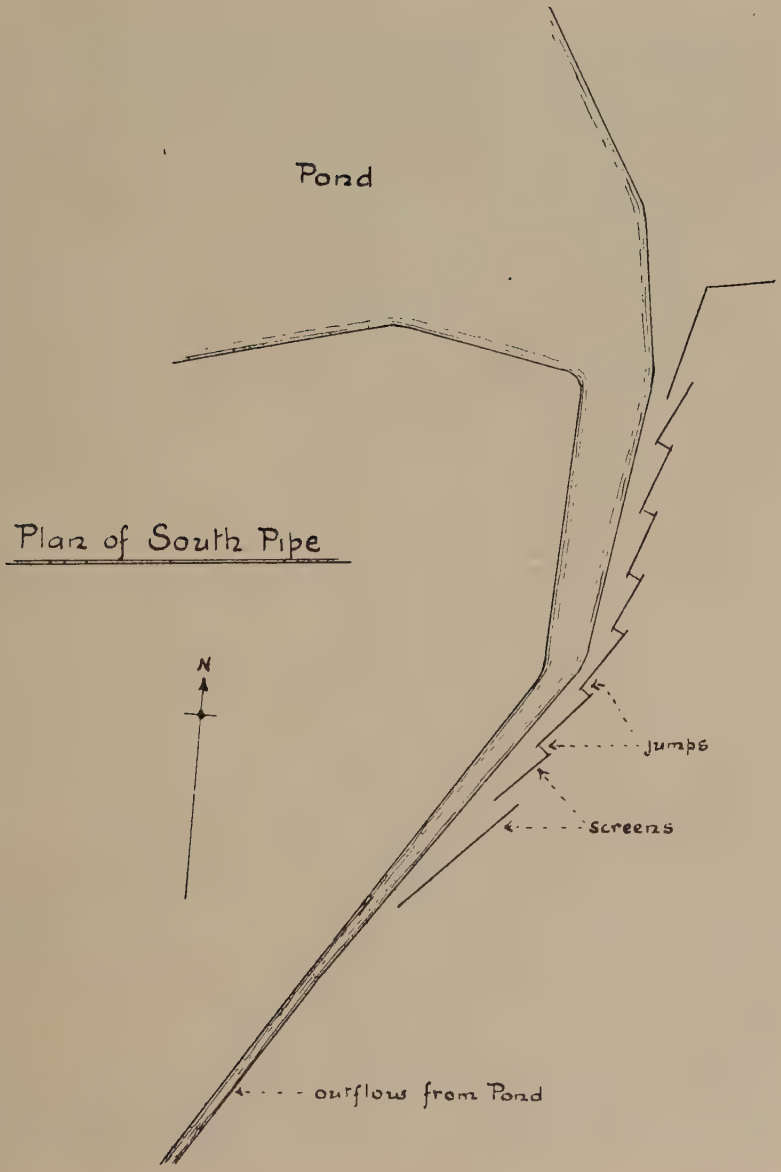
It lies well away from any road, and consists of a pond about 2½ acres in extent[1] in the centre of a wood of about 13 acres, composed mainly of larch, spruce, and sycamore, with an undergrowth of privet, snowberry, and box. Each pipe, of which there are four (although the western one has been out of order and unused for very many years), is about fifty yards in length, eighteen inches deep, and narrows from about twelve feet at the mouth to one foot at the end. The hoops spanning the pipes are made of wych-elm, and are covered with wire netting of two-inch mesh at the mouth, though smaller towards the end. This netting reaches for the first 65 feet from the mouth of the pipe to within three feet of the bank, and for the remaining length of the pipe touches the ground.

[1] A very large pond is not desirable, as the birds might not notice the "piper."



Map of Decoy-pond and surrounding wood at Boarstall.

The last two yards of netting make up the tunnel-net before alluded to, and, laced over two willow hoops, form a cylinder. This stretches along the ground from the point where the pipe itself finishes, and is detachable from the last wired arch; a stake on either side threading the mesh and driven into the turf forms the simple but adequate means of holding the two portions together.


Pond
Plan of South Pipe
N
Jumps
Screens
Outflow from Pond

The screens, of which there are 29 in all, are constructed of straw laid over a hazel framework, the whole being supported by stout oak uprights tarred where they enter the ground. The southern pipe has nine screens, while the eastern and northern pipes are provided with ten screens each. Each screen is nearly seven feet in height, the length varying from ten feet to thirty feet; the peep-holes, protected by small pieces of board which slide parallel with the screens into the rods of the framework, are quickly moved when a view of the water is required. Keeper White stated that 14 or 15 years was the average life of a screen if properly made in the first instance. The straw is best if it has not been put through "the machine," that is to say, if it has been threshed with a flail, and therefore left unbroken.

The bank at the mouth of each pipe shelves gently to the water, and on these banks the duck will often be found sunning themselves or sleeping. There are tree-trunks in the water a few yards from the bank, and these serve a similar purpose.

Six to eight decoy-ducks are kept on the water, and, in White's opinion, the best birds of all for the purpose are Rouen ducks, which are half as large again as the mallard. The last-named is the fowl most frequently captured at the Boarstall decoy, although teal are commonly taken, and sometimes widgeon.

A remarkable capture was that of January 3rd, 1906, when 49 duck and 1 teal were taken in one pipe at the same time.

The total captures from August, 1904, to March, 1907, of which we saw the records, were as follows:—

Season 1904-1905. 381 Duck, 15 Teal, 2 Widgeon.
,, 1905-1906. 483 ,, 183 ,, 4 ,,
,, 1906-1907. 571 ,, 47 ,, *Nil.*

Photo by *Chapman, Buckingham.*

BOARSTALL DECOY—MOUTH OF SOUTH PIPE.

A ruse which sometimes succeeds when the duck are not readily lured into the pipe is to fasten a red handkerchief, a badger's skin, or a fox's brush to the piper before sending her over the jumps.

White has found the duck following a stoat which was running along the bank of one of the pipes and effected a capture by its aid; in fact, he is of opinion that a stuffed skin, if drawn by a string in front of the screens, would be sufficient to entice the fowl under the nets, so great, at times, is their curiosity. He has, however, not yet put his idea to the test.

On some of the Norfolk decoys a piece of burning turf is carried at the end of a pointed stick to prevent the fowl on the water, whose powers of scent are very great, from finding the decoy-man, but at Boarstall no precaution of this sort is taken.

The season commences on the 1st August and continues to the end of February, which is, of course, the beginning of the close season for wild-fowl.

It is very difficult to say exactly what is the age of the Boarstall decoy; Major Aubrey-Fletcher has no record of the decoy which enables it to be dated. Bishop White Kennet's "Parochial Antiquities" contains numerous references to Boarstall, but there is no mention of this decoy. An admirable folding plate by Michael Burghers which occurs in that book shows Boarstall House as it was at some date between 1691 (which appears in the margin of the engraving) and 1695, when the book was published. A considerable stretch of country is shown beyond the house, and it is most unlikely that the decoy would have been omitted if it had existed at that time, even though it might be slightly to the west of the landscape shown, but this is merely negative evidence. An edition of White Kennet by Dr. Bardinel in 1818 contains a reference to the Boarstall decoy as "a matter of good ingenuity as well as curiosity, and of greater

advantage."[2] The one-inch map of Bucks made by Jeffery in 1770 clearly marks the decoy, with the pipes as at present. The conclusion seems to be that it was probably made in the early part of the eighteenth century.

There is a decoy-pond near to Upper Winchendon, close to a house which is still called Decoy Farm; it has not been used as a decoy-pond within living memory, and the same may be said of a pond near to Tythrop House, just across the Oxfordshire border; the word "Decoy" still appears on the map there.

The decoy-pond in the parish of Upper Winchendon had very little open water when visited at the end of March, 1923; it presented the appearance of a wood with small pools of water here and there. The general shape of the pond and pipes could be made out quite plainly, however. The pond at Tythrop is still less like a decoy-pond, being now nothing more than a withy-bed; and no sign of a pipe is discernible or was known to the keeper, who has been there for very many years. The name "Decoy-pond Wood" appears on the map close to Calvert Station; the Great Central line runs through the wood just south of the site of the pond, which is barely indicated by a depression in the ground; the pipes cannot now be traced.

In Wotton Underwood Park are the remains of a decoy on the north-western side of the lake, which is 60 acres or more in extent, and consequently too large for a dog to be employed with effect, as it could not be seen across the great width of water. Formerly there were four decoys, but the one to the south and two on the east side of the lake have long been removed;[3] the relics of the fourth exhibit an

[2] This passage is referred to by Lipscomb (vol. I., p. 89), who ascribes it to Delafield, an able antiquary who flourished 1690-1755 (?) and left notes, now in the Bodleian.

[3] Sir Ralph Payne-Gallwey speaks of "three small decoys" at Wotton: see his "Book of Duck Decoys," published in 1886, p. 64.

ingenious combination of teal-trap and a common decoy. A teal-trap proper is a wired-in enclosure projecting into the water with its single entrance guarded by a door which slides perpendicularly in guides, or runners, and is raised or lowered by means of a rope from the bank. In this enclosure the decoy-ducks are accustomed to be regularly fed, and when the door is open they swim into the trap, followed by the wild birds. The door is then shut and their escape cut off.

In the case of the Wotton decoy the method was somewhat different: close to the bank of the lake and not far from the saw-mill is a small island roughly 100 yards long and a third of that distance in width. At the outer edge of this island and about three feet from the edge of the water there was a continuous screen thirty yards long and nine feet high, made though not arranged in the same manner as the Boar-stall screens. Projecting into the water for about twenty feet from the bank was a wired-in enclosure surrounded by a live osier fence which grew in the water and concealed the wire. This enclosure stretched parallel with the bank for about 15 yards, and could be entered from the water at the south end by a sliding door, like that described above. At the north end of the enclosure was a narrower door, also made to pull up and down, which led into a channel similar to an ordinary decoy-pipe, with still a third sliding-door, also controlled by a rope. In the front part of the enclosure, where the osier fence grew, were five openings formed by inserting horizontally funnel-shaped structures of basket-work;[4] the outer and larger mouth measured five feet in diameter, and the smaller end considerably less. The mouths of the funnels were

[4] These were made by Fleet, of Aylesbury, and lasted about five years.

sunk in the water nearly half-way, and their smaller ends were therefore a few inches above the water of the enclosure.

A number of decoy-ducks was kept and fed regularly inside the enclosure, always to the whistle of the keeper. The large sliding door at the south end was usually kept open, and the decoy-ducks swam through it for their meal. Sometimes the door was closed, however, and the decoy-birds soon found that by swimming into the wicker-funnels they could jump down from the small end into the enclosure, where their food was scattered.

The wild-fowl followed their tame cousins, and when the decoy-keeper saw through the screen that a number of them was in the enclosure he showed himself near to the south door. The captured birds after a little fluttering soon saw the opening at the north end and went quickly into the pipe, when the decoy-man closed the north door and raised the south door so as to enable the tame birds to return onto the lake. He then went to the north door, and by showing himself to the birds in the pipe, he drove them into the tunnel-net at the far end.

Beside wild-duck and teal, pintail and shovellers were caught, and as many as 72 duck were caught at one time in 1903.

The decoy was built about 60 years ago, and was laid out by Mr. White, of Boarstall. At the present time only a few posts, some torn wire-netting, and the north and south doors remain to indicate what has been. The pipe has been obliterated, and in a short while none will be found with any knowledge or remembrance of a singular contrivance for the capture of duck on so large a sheet of water; it is the only example of the combination of teal-trap and decoy known to the writer. It was

last used in or about the year 1908, and was discontinued when it became the practice to rear a large number of wild-duck at Wotton for shooting.

The peace and quiet of the decoy-man's calling, and the limited period of the year during which he can exercise it, may lend it a rosy appearance; but there is another side: his activities, confined as they are to winter, may be conducted in bad weather,—it is then indeed that most duck are attracted to the pond. As they resort to it just before dawn the decoy-keeper may have to work through most of the night breaking the ice on the pipes if the frost is severe. On one such occasion White had two fingers frozen, and has lost all sensation in their tips; at another time he narrowly escaped a falling tree, brought down by a snowstorm. On another occasion his lamp was blown out while he was breaking ice, and a false step in the dark plunged him into the freezing water.

A decoy affords a singular example of the entire efficacy of a practice which has persisted without any modification for some centuries. It is a triumph of human ingenuity, celebrated with a silent peacefulness which suggests a Quaker meeting.

CHAPTER X

WORDS AND WIT OF THE VALE

In the history of the human mind there is a sort of antique furniture which I collect, not merely for their antiquity, but for the sound condition in which I still find them, and the compactness which they still show.

I. D'Israeli: "*The Philosophy of Proverbs*" *in the* "*Curiosities of Literature.*"

In our first chapter we saw the moats often outlast the buildings they were made to protect; indeed, the yielding earth furnishes a more lasting memorial than is made by material which appears more stubborn. In a similar way words linger in the byways of language and survive—if not the "drums and tramplings of three conquests"—at least the times in which they were familiarly current. The use of technical words is contingent upon the industry or occupation to which they relate; thus in Chapter V. we met with the highly-interesting word "mowstead,"—with a meaning more readily understood by our Saxon forefathers than by many who know nothing to-day of the use of the flail.

Buckinghamshire has one industry almost peculiar to itself—that of turning chair-legs in the Chiltern beech-woods. They who follow that picturesque calling and manage with their simple pole-lathe to compete successfully with power-driven machinery (by using the raw material at the point of origin), are called "bodgers," a word of obscure origin. The primitive and easily-erected shelter which they raise above their lathe always bears the less interesting name of "shop."

When we come to other technical matters, such as thatching, we again find words of long standing; the process of drawing straw ready for the thatcher is known as "yelming," and the layers of straw laid on the roof are "stulches;"[1] these must be even and without inequalities. The withies which bind down the edges are called "sprays."

In hedging we meet with one or two old words. Thus, when he layers an old hedge the workman needs protection from the thorns, and for this purpose wears gloves made of whit-leather. Sometimes he may use a more pliable form of leather for the right-hand, which has to grasp the bill-hook, but the left is enclosed in the whit-leather so as to grasp the thorns boldly.

White—or whit—leather is made by soaking the skin of a horse in salt and water; the skin becomes externally hard and tough, and in order to get on the gloves, which he calls "cuffs," the hedger buries them in earth for a day or two before use. On one occasion the cuffs were duly buried late in the evening, and the hedger afterwards stopped so long in the ale-house that his memory of the spot became dim, so that when they were wanted he was quite unable to find them, and it was only when he dug over his garden late in the spring that he found them. In layering a hedge upright stakes are thrust in at regular intervals, and are secured at the top by twisting willow, ash-shoots, or, best of all, briars; this is known as "heathering," or "eddering."[2]

The loading of a cart in the harvest-field is always begun at the back; when it is fully laden it must

[1] This meaning is given to the word also in Wright's "Dialect Dictionary" as a Gloucestershire word. Wright derives yelm from Old English "gelm," meaning an armful, or bundle.

[2] The word is given by Halliwell, "Dictionary of Archaic and Provincial Words," as "Eddering." William Ellis, in his "Modern Husbandman," 1750, has "eddowing," and Batchelor's "Agriculture in Beds," 1813, gives "eddering."

neither "hang" (that is, hang back so as to raise the shafts), or "bear," (that is, weigh upon the horse), when drawing upon level ground.

A very usual way of securing cows is by means of two bars, one fixed in a vertical position and the other capable of being so fixed but hinged at the bottom so as to open for the cow's head to pass through, and then to be closed behind the horns and held in position by a heavy wooden catch. This prevents animals from interfering with their neighbours' food, and makes it easier for the milker of a young and restless cow. The contrivance is sometimes called "clapses," which is said to be a corruption of "clasps."

From cow-house to stable is but a step. In the stable are sometimes seen wooden boards, slung by chains from the roof trusses, to divide the building into stalls separating one horse from its neighbours. These boards are known as "bails;" this, however, is a "dictionary word."

There is one way in which dialect is preserved by more than oral tradition; this is not exactly in literature, but it is in print, which may help to save the words so recorded from oblivion. The allusion is to auctioneers' sale-catalogues, and the following words have been copied from catalogues issued during 1922:

Butter kiver—a shallow wooden vessel oval in shape. This word the Oxford English Dictionary derives from Old English "cyf," "a tub;" but the English Dialect Dictionary sees its origin in the French "cuvier," a bathing-tub.

Mullin—the bridle of a cart-horse, with or without blinkers. This is also called a "halter" in Bucks, which seems not so good, as it might be confused with a hempen halter. The origin of "mullin" is not known; as it

includes the bit might there be some possible association with the "cross moline" from a fancied resemblance of the snaffle to a mill-rynd?

Wantey—A belly-band used for cart-horses. The derivation of this given in the English Dialect Dictionary introduces us to two Old English words: "wamb"—belly, and "tye"—band.

Shambles—the fore "ladder" or framework attached to a cart for hay—or harvest—carting; the corresponding one at the back is known as the "in-ladder."

Passing from technical to more generally used words we find many which are used in other counties. One would not expect, indeed, that a midland county would own words which were unknown elsewhere. Some attempt has been made to compile a list of Bucks dialect words;[3] most of those which follow appear there, though not all. The present endeavour is merely to place on record a few words which may often be heard in the Vale of Aylesbury in 1922.

Often the word is a mere variation of an ordinary dictionary word, though possibly with a slight variation in meaning. For example:

Athirt,—from "athwart" or across; "Ar come athirt the gardin."

Blate,—"A blatin' cow soon forgets her calf." Here the word is clearly a variant of *bleat*.

Bunt,—to butt, as sheep attack with lowered head.

Cla'holt,—to claw, or catch hold of anything.

Fotch,—the past tense of "fetch."

Kid,—a pod, used as a verb: "These pays have kidded well." Possibly it is a variant of "cod."

[3] In three articles edited by Mr. A. H. Cocks which appeared in the "Records of Bucks," Vol. VII., p.p. 61 to 70 and 284 to 303, and Vol. IX., p.p. 124 to 172.

Kurlick,—a mere corruption of "charlock," or wild mustard.

Lattern,—late, particularly of fruit ripening after the bulk of the crop.

Okkard,—awkward, in the sense of "obstinate."

More interesting, because less obvious, are the following words:—

'Accle,—"accle yoursel'," meaning "hurry up!"

'Aggle,—to vex. "I wor fair aggled." The original meaning seems to be "soil, or defile," as in bad weather, consequently the annoyance proceeding from this untidiness, or from any other source of discomfort or irritation.

(Query: Is it cognate with "draggle?")

Bransings,—a corruption of "brands' ends," or the pieces which drop from the fire-dogs when a log has burnt through in the middle.

Dilling,—the smallest pig in a litter, said to be a corruption of "darling." If so it is certainly not mother's darling, because the least of a litter of pigs has less than its due share of milk, being squeezed out.

Garm,[4]—to smear, "é wor all garmed up wi' mud."

Glibby,—Slippery, used of the roads in frosty weather. The word is spelt "gliddy" in Wright, and he explains it as akin to "glide," but it seems to the present writer to have a "b" sound.

Harrup,[5]—to scratch, or dig.

Over-right,—opposite, "Ye'll see 'im over-right t' wood-gëate."

Pimmocky,—dainty, said by Mr. Cocks to mean

[4] Spelt "gaum" by Wright.

[5] Mr. Gurney rightly points out that this word is always strongly aspirated; the tendency is the other way as a rule, and Mr. Gurney thinks that both "accle" and "aggle" have dropped an "h" apiece. Wright gives "aggle" for North Bucks.

"slightly unwell, indisposed," but it indicates rather the fanciful choice of an invalid or spoiled child.

Pitching,—the stone or brick-paved yard, on which milk-cans can be drained, etc.

Shut in (or out),—to harness, or unharness,—the phrase is invariably used. Not wishing to stop long on a visit one says: "I won't shut out, thank 'ee."

Slommakin',—slatternly, slovenly.

Unkid,—strange, unusual, nasty, ugly, dreary, etc. Halliwell derives it from A.S. un-cwyd= quiet, solitary; while Wright compares it with uncouth. It is often used adverbially; "Ar were unkid frit," meaning "I was uncommonly frightened."

Watshut,—A corruption of wet-shod. Thus, the present writer having walked through Grendon Wood in winter was greeted with the exclamation: "Then ar'll warr'nt 'ees watshut."

This list would be eight or ten times longer if it were desired to make it at all exhaustive, but if one particularly wished one characteristic Bucks word it would certainly be "awever," used at the end of the sentence. The meaning is distinct from "however," and is much nearer "at any rate." Thus one might say: "He'll be there, he said he'd go, awever." Somewhat similarly "whatever" is used at the end of a sentence to give emphasis with the meaning "on any account." For instance, one says: "I'd not like him to do that, whatever." But the nicest word and softest in sound is undoubtedly "awever," which is often used very effectually.

Many words in common use are too widely used to make it necessary to say much about them. Thus "Pitch" for a hill, and "Bottom" for a narrow

valley may be heard in many parts of England. Similarly some familiar names of plants and birds occur very generally. Thus we always call the hornbeam "hay-beech," and the lesser striped convolvolus loses half its bad character as a garden-weed under the name of "withwīnd." A heron is usually called a "moll'ern," though that should properly be applied to the female only. The green woodpecker is often the "whetile," a name which is mentioned by Yarrell. Speaking of birds, a nest is always a "neest," with the plural "nestës."

The traction engine which drives the drum for threshing is sufficiently modern always to be called a "steamer" in our inland county.

Lastly may be mentioned two words in very general use which have lingered with us long after disappearing from general use. One is the word "stale," used for the handle of a tool, and quite generally accepted in that sense as late as the seventeenth century.[6] The other word is "mound," meaning a dead fence without any idea of embankment. In this sense it is very familiar to students of churchwardens' accounts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, where items for "mounding of the church yarde" are often found. Within the last week a man working for the present writer proposed to move a length of that very modern contrivance the split chestnut fence bound with wire. "'Twill make a very good mound," was the comment.

As an example of wisdom begotten of long years' attendance at markets there is the proverb: "Cheap corn, dear horn," implying that the prices of corn and cattle move in opposite directions.

The unfortunate effect of a standardized educational curriculum, together with modern facilities of trans-

[6] See "The English Improver Improved," by Blith, 3rd Edition, 1653; within adjacent pages the word is indifferently spelled "stale," "stail," and "stayl"—so elastic was the orthography of those days!

port, must be to do away with local words and phrases, and so help to destroy county character as much as a standardized house upsets the individuality of the native product. The present writer is among those who deplore this tendency, but he sees one distinct advantage in education, namely, the destruction of superstition in its more mischievous forms. He has never seen evidence of faith in spells or charms, and where ill-founded beliefs linger they are such as harm nobody. It is thought, for example, that in alternate years the pods of broad beans point upwards and downwards, and that the pips of apples in a similar way point to and from the core. There are often some fowls which roost in trees in preference to the hen-house. It is imagined that if a fox stands below them in the moonlight the reflected glare from his eyes has such an effect on the birds that they drop into his expectant mouth. There may be something more than superstition in the idea that the root of the wild arum ("lords and ladies") dried and chopped finely and then mixed with a horse's corn much improves the appearance of its coat.

A "charm" for warts very recently practised successfully by a buxom young woman near Ashendon was as follows:—"I took an ould hoddy-snail[7] and rubbed him on the wart, and then shoved a thorn through him and throwed him away where I told nobody." The cure, though unkind to the snail, was efficacious.

On the whole it would seem that the men of Bucks are as vigorous mentally as they certainly are physically. An expression sometimes used of a healthy infant is: "Aye, a's fierce and hale." Such a child, one thinks, must have been one of our octogenarian

[7] Hoddy-snail, the common snail (helix aspera), from hod or hud, a case, husk, or shell. French, hotte, a basket carried on the back. "Records of Bucks," IX., 145.

witnesses to fact in Chapter VI. He for years used to walk four miles to work each morning, and always passed Aylesbury Church when the clock was striking four. When he reached home in the evening he used to be glad of moonlit nights so that he could work in his allotment. But that is a feeble performance in comparison with a man named Lacey, who once lived at Princes Risborough; he was an under-sawyer, and was working one year at St. Leonards. Thither he walked each morning, and it could hardly be less than nine or ten miles. At night he used to walk back carrying one of the great outside "slabs," or first cuts from the trunk, which are the sawyer's perquisite. The top-sawyer, who lived at or near Cholesbury, offered him the use of a room in his own cottage, to save him this tremendous walk, but Lacey indignantly answered: "Stop here along o' you? I've my taters to mould up when I gets whoam." Mr. T. Bishop, of College Farm, Aston Clinton, vouches for this story.

The mention of physical vigour reminds one of a story which is told of the late Mr. Treadwell, of Upper Winchendon, the well-known sheep-breeder. He met the Rector of Waddesdon, who was about to marry, though somewhat late in life, and said to him: "Is this right, Rector, that you're a-going to get married; I hopes not." "Really," replied the reverend gentleman, "why should I not be married?" "Well, I only hopes as she bain't a young wife." "Why?" said the Rector, "the patriarchs married young wives, you know." "That may be, Rector, but you ha'n't got a patriarch's constitootion."

They who have the wisdom to pass their lives in the country generally turn out "good lives," in the Assurance Companies' meaning of the phrase. Thus a woman was found in a very depressed state one evening, mourning for her father who had died that

morning "in his eighty-eight. He never had a day's illness afore the las' week or two, when he took to 's bed,—but he wasted tarrible."

"He was unable to eat, I suppose?" enquired her listener.

"It worn't that altogether; he ate a pretty fair dinner, yesterday, 'awever, but he didn't eat much to-day—he died afore dinner-time."

It is wrestling with the stubborn earth which makes us strong, but when the land is *too* stiff it may almost win the contest. For instance, one of the last Duke of Buckingham's tenants at Wotton was named Cave; his land was low-lying and wet. He had just been through a bad time with his sheep, and he was feeling somewhat desperate. When he knew that the Duke was likely to be about he took care to meet him, but mounted on a bull. The Duke was naturally astonished, and asked him why he had taken to such a mount, receiving the reply: "Well, your Grace, my land's that wet it's pulled the guts out o' my hosses, so I must either ride thishyer animal or take to a boat."

This chapter may be fittingly closed with a mention of the common use of "carr" for "carry." An old and much respected neighbour of the writer is in constant requisition as a bearer at funerals. Referring once to this he said: "If there's as many to carr' me to the grave as I've carr'ed,—I reckon chu'chyard'll be proper full."

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